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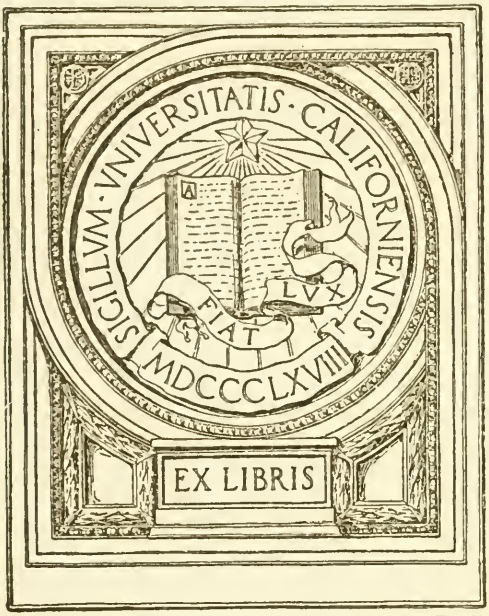

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THE WORKS

OF

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

VOL. II.

MARY OF BURGUNDY.

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THE WORKS

OF

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

"D'autres auteurs l'ont encore plus avili, (le roman,) en y mêlant les tableaux dégoutant du vice; et tandis que le premier avantage des fictions est de rassembler autour de l'homme tout ce qui, dans la nature, peut lui servir de leçon ou de modèle, on a imaginé qu'on tirerait une utilité quelconque des peintures odieuses de mauvaises mœurs; comme si elles pouvaient jamais laisser le cœur qui les repousse, dans une situation aussi pure que le cœur qui les aurait toujours ignorées. Mais un roman tel qu'on peut le concevoir, tel que nous en avons quelques modèles, est une des plus belles productions de l'esprit humain, une des plus influentes sur la morale des individus, qui doit former ensuite les mœurs publiques."—MADAME DE STAEL. *Essai sur les Fictions.*

"Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:
Forse dietro a me, con miglior voci
Si pregherà, perchè Cirra risponda."

DANTE. *Paradiso*, Canto I.

VOL. II.

MARY OF BURGUNDY.

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MARY OF BURGUNDY:

OR

The Revolt of Ghent.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

"Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly
That thou wouldst holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win."

MACBETH.

LONDON:
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TO

HUGH SCOTT, ESQ.

OF HARDEN,

THIS WORK,

AN INADEQUATE TESTIMONY

OF

SINCERE RESPECT, REGARD, AND ESTEEM,

Is Dedicated,

BY

HIS FAITHFUL AND OBLIGED SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

157149

INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

The following pages were written at a period when Europe had just been agitated by a new revolution in a country already remarkable in history for one of the most tremendous social convulsions which ever shook down old and decaying institutions, to make room for others better adapted to the age. Earthquakes, however, seldom pass away with only one shock, and the milder and more beneficent revolution which occurred in France in the year 1830 was perhaps but a natural consequence of that which went before. Nevertheless, the expulsion of the Bourbon dynasty, and the fears and apprehensions of a new period of anarchy which it spread throughout Europe, naturally turned my thoughts to the consideration of other great popular movements mentioned in history. Having been in Paris at the time when the last revolution took place, and having had various opportunities of learning the motives, and some of the secret proceedings of those who acted a part in that important transaction, it became a curious subject of inquiry, whether it generally occurs, in such insurrections, (successful or not,) that the pressure of circumstances, and the inevitable course of events, by forcing forward that human selfishness, which is latent, if not developed, in every bosom, into prominent action, do or do not so modify the results, that only a partial change is effected, even when the convulsion that takes place seems, by its strength and fury, destined to sweep away all before it, and not alone to bring forward new dynasties and im-

proved institutions, but to create totally different forms of government, and alter the whole framework of society. In looking back throughout all history, I found that in almost every case where great movements of the masses had taken place, the ultimate results were by no means commensurate with the forces brought into operation; that institutions, very similar to those which had been carried away, rose again in their place,—modified, it is true, but slightly; and that changes of names were more frequently to be found than changes of things, as the consequences of a revolution. The new institutions principally differed from the old ones in being more susceptible of after modification; and in building from the ruins of the past,—as the world is continually doing,—it seemed to me, we usually erect fabrics which we can enlarge and improve with greater facility than could be done with the sterner and more solid structures of ages passed away.

Still, however, the question recurred, why it is that the effect is always less than we should have anticipated from the cause? —why, when a tyranny has been overthrown, when liberty has deviated into the fiercest anarchy, and the most necessary restraints of society have been set at nought, as insupportable shackles upon man's freedom—why is it that we find, in a wonderfully short space of time, a new but no less oppressive tyranny established; laws more stringent than ever, succeeding others which had been blotted out; and nations submitting patiently to bonds more weighty, if not more grievous, than those which they have cast off? Is it, I asked myself, that old institutions are really stronger than they seem, and exist still, though overwhelmed in the torrent of innovation, which, like a flood that has overwhelmed a city in a valley, gradually subsides, and leaves the solider constructions standing, though desolate, to be tenanted by new inhabitants in a brighter day?—or is it that there is less real than apparent strength in the great revolutionary movements which take place from time to time, more violence than vigour, more fury than power? Perhaps something of both; but yet, in many of the great popular ebullitions which have marked memorable epochs, we find immense and extraordinary energy

displayed by the people in asserting their rights and liberties,—courage, wisdom, resolute endurance, perseverance—and, nevertheless, comparatively little has been accomplished of all the great objects that were sought. In almost all these instances, I thought, I could distinctly trace various modifications of human selfishness, on the part both of leaders and followers, acting, as it were, in the manner of dams and sluices, and, by diverting the stream of popular energy from one direct and straightforward course, diminishing the force of the current, and turning the torrent, which might have overborne every obstacle, into a mere inundation, which gradually flowed off, or evaporated, as the sources which supplied it were exhausted.

It was with these reflections fresh in my mind, that I sat down to write the romance that follows from a part of history which I had studied while considering the great questions that I have stated. The period, and more especially the fate and character of the fair heiress of the Burgundian coronet had interested me much, and I thought they might also interest the reader, while the historical events related, and the characters introduced to illustrate the views I entertained regarding the general course of popular insurrections, might afford some instruction or some warning. Although I adhered somewhat closely to the facts of history, in regard to Mary herself and the revolt of the people of Ghent, I did not think it necessary to abstain from the usual licence allowed to the romance writer, of embellishing the narrative with various fictitious characters, of compressing some of the events which occupied a longer, into a shorter space of time, and of supplying all those adjuncts which imagination may suggest, either to render the tale more pleasing to the reader, or to display more fully the workings of those passions which there are historical grounds for believing, produced the great general result. Nevertheless, there was sufficient verisimilitude in the work to have prevented a very learned antiquary as well as skilful diplomatist, and a native of the city of Ghent, from finding any farther fault with the author than for having carried up one of the towers of the palace somewhat

higher than it ever was carried, in order to give the Princess a view over the city and the neighbouring country. I must attribute, however, a great deal to his good humour and inclination to be pleased, for I cannot doubt that with his knowledge of history and his critical ability, he might have discovered a great many more errors if he had thought fit to look for them.

I trust that the public will continue as kind; and in order to merit as far as possible its favour in this respect, I shall proceed to make a fair confession of the principal deviations from fact of which I have been guilty. Amongst the personages which appear upon the scene, there is a group which naturally detaches itself from the rest, and stands forth somewhat too evidently perhaps as formed of creatures of imagination. The old Lord of Hannut, his fair niece Alice, the Vert Gallant of Hannut, and his Green Riders, are all more or less of this class. Not, indeed, that I mean to say no such person as the Vert Gallant ever existed, for the whole of that part of the country, more especially on the side of the Ardennes, is full of traditions respecting him and his followers, which must have had some foundation in fact. For centuries, the frontiers of France and those small feudal sovereignties now consolidated in the Belgian kingdom were infested by innumerable bands of free companions, many of which obtained a very unenviable reputation. Not so, however, with the Green Riders, who seem to have been friendly to the peasantry and the lower classes, and to have won a degree of reverence and attachment from them remembered even to the present day. Thus, where the Yorkshire inn displays the sign of the Robin Hood, and the tale circulates of the bold outlaw and his forest companions, on the limits of France and Belgium, appears the sign of the Vert Gallant, and many a legend is related of his exploits in times past.

Under these circumstances I thought it quite fair to employ such a personage for my own purposes, and to place him in the times that suited me best; and as, according to tale and tradition, he underwent various transformations, sometimes turning out a count, a prince, and even a king, I did not see

any reason why I should not change him into anybody most agreeable to myself.

In regard to the old Lord of Hannut, the reader acquainted with antiquarian lore may, perhaps, object that though the study of astrology and the belief in that pretended science was indeed carried down to much later periods, the persons who followed it were not generally those of a very elevated rank, but rather quacks employed by the superstitious nobility of an unenlightened age to discover the secrets of the future. Instances, however, exist of astrology having been deeply studied and implicitly believed by persons both of high rank and high intellect, sufficiently numerous to justify me in introducing such a personage.

The characters which I have pointed out as purely imaginary take but a small share in the historical events which are mingled with the incidents of the romance; but I am bound to acknowledge that another who occupies a very prominent situation throughout the whole work is, at least in most of the details, fictitious also. I refer to the principal male personage in the book, namely, Albert Maurice. It was my wish to show how, in any great movement of the people, a man endowed with the noblest qualities of mind, and moved by many of the most generous impulses of the human heart, ardently seeking the welfare of his country and struggling to resist the influence of all selfish passions both in himself and others, might, by the combined effect of external circumstances and some few personal weaknesses, be led step by step to acts that he never contemplated, and to crimes that he abhorred; how patriotism, by an easy transition, might give place to ambition; how the love of liberty might, step by step, lead to the tolerance, if not the encouragement of anarchy; how the generous defender of one class might be changed to the sanguinary oppressor of another; and how, by indulgence, the passions in his own breast, like the mobs which he led or directed, might in time become his masters, and force him forward to deeds the most abhorrent to his better nature.

I did not find such a personage in the history of those times,

and accordingly I created him. The leaders of the various insurrections of Ghent were generally coarse in character, though occasionally endowed with great abilities, and an extraordinary grasp of mind; but I wanted something more. To bring out the great points in a picture of the fall of a high human heart, it was necessary that I should have a high human heart to deal with; and not finding one at that period really in existence, I was obliged so far to violate historical truth as to endow the leader of the revolt with qualities which he might have possessed, though probably he did not. I trust in so doing, however, that I have in no degree outraged probability. The first Van Artevelde had many qualities in common with Albert Maurice; the second had many others; and there is no reason why we should not suppose that the great advance which society had made since the death of Philip, might not have added those graces of demeanour and elevation of character to the citizen of Ghent, which I have thought fit to attribute to my hero in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

The picture of Mary of Burgundy herself is, I believe, perfectly consistent with history; and all the principal events connected with that princess are simply related as they occurred, to the best of my knowledge and information. Her fate was a sad and perilous one: the child of a brutal and selfish tyrant, she was treated by him merely as a means of attaining the objects of his ambition; and, left an orphan at the age of twenty-one, she saw her hand contended for by numerous suitors, all but one odious to her personally, and dangerous to the state. With the armies which her warlike father had collected, scattered and discomfited; with the greater part of his gallant nobility slaughtered or in prison; with the oldest and most favoured servants of her house—such as Philip of Crevecœur—abandoning her interests, and betraying her fortresses to the enemy; with her subjects in revolt, and herself almost a captive in their hands, she beheld her dominions invaded by the most powerful, the most subtle, and the most treacherous monarch of the age. Grief upon grief was piled upon her head: the magistrates

of Ghent appointed by her father, contrary to the privileges of the citizens, fell a sacrifice to popular fury in the manner described in the tale, as soon as the death of Charles the Bold was ascertained. The Chancellor Hugonet, and Imbercourt, Count of Meghe, two of her most devoted friends, were executed under her very eyes, while, with dishevelled hair and floods of tears, she was beseeching the citizens in the public market-place to spare them; and the blood of her faithful servants is said to have sprinkled her garments as she was carried fainting from the terrible scene. Her friends and relations were banished from the city; and Louis XI., marching on at the head of a large army, while affecting to consider the interests of the orphan princess, not only robbed her of her territories, but exercised the most inhuman cruelties upon her subjects. Perhaps in the whole range of history no example occurs of an unjust war carried on with such barbarous incidents. Not content with the usual excesses of warfare, wherever resistance was shown by the vassals of the house of Burgundy, Louis called in the arm of the executioner to accomplish what strife had left undone. On several occasions more than a hundred prisoners were beheaded in one day, for no crime but having remained faithful to their sovereign; and old John Molinet, an eye-witness of what he relates, gives the most fearful picture of the cruelties exercised by a king calling himself Most Christian. "The account would be too long and incredible," he says, in his quaint and pedantic style, "if I were to reckon up the exactions, the scornings, the opprobriums, the slaughters, the tyrannies, the robberies, the seizures, and the inhumanities, which the king permitted his free archers to commit in the conquests which they effected, *per fas et nefas*, of the towns named; for then full course was given to the deflowering of virgins, the effusion of innocent blood, the spoiling of hospitals, the pillage of matrons, the imprisonment of youths, the destruction of children, the drowning of old men, the burning of churches, the persecution of all persons, the violation of women, the demolition of towns, and the ruining of the castles

and farm-houses of the open country, as long as fire and sword could do their work, which failed sooner than the rage of the satellites who employed them." He then goes on to detail the tortures inflicted on the prisoners and the peasantry, especially of the female sex, and sums up all by assuring us that it was common to demand of a wife a ransom for her captive husband, and when it was obtained, to deliver her only his corpse—that villages were constantly burnt, after having paid composition—that prisoners were even crucified in their dungeons, and that, in the end, Louis caused ten thousand mowers to be collected from the Soissonnois, Vermandois, and neighbouring territories, and employed to cut down the rich harvests of Flanders and Hainault while they were yet green.

Tidings of all these events poured in upon the hapless daughter of Charles the Bold, while she was yet grieving for her father's death, and opposing to her revolted citizens nought but the meek and gentle spirit of a pure and beneficent nature. No sign of irritation, no angry word, no harsh reproach ever escaped her; and all her dealings with her people were in sorrow, not in anger, till at length the fire of faction wore itself out, and, entangled in difficulties, apparently inextricable, the citizens appealed to her for aid, whose sorrows they had rudely violated, whose prayers they had rejected and contemned, whose means of protecting herself or them they had paralysed, whose personal liberty they had abridged, and whose rights and authority they had trampled under foot. There was now no resource but in the house of Austria; and policy, as well as inclination, led Mary of Burgundy to bestow her hand upon the only prince, of all her many suitors, who could defend her dominions and who possessed her heart.

A short period of brightness succeeded; and after a few years of uninterrupted happiness, the Princess met her death in consequence of a fall from her horse, while pursuing her favourite sport of hawking. Excessive delicacy induced her to conceal the injury she had received, even from her husband, till the physicians' art would no longer avail, and she died in her youth universally regretted and beloved.

Such was the fate of one of the most amiable and accomplished ladies of those times; and it seemed to me, that no period and no series of events in the range of history, could afford better materials for a romance. I found little need of calling upon imagination for incidents, when so many were already supplied by history; and I had only to add some few embellishments, and to enliven the scene by clothing the characters in the customs and manners of the times, as far as my information would admit. The favour the work obtained with the public I trust may still be continued to it, as it owes little to the author, and almost all to the historical interest of the period.

Amongst what may be termed the embellishments, is a description of a thunderstorm, accompanied by that most awful of phenomena, ground lightning, where the earth, or the vapour that rises upon it, charged with electricity, pours out the fiery fluid towards the clouds above. I had often heard of this extraordinary effect in the part of the country where my scene is laid, and remembered a sad disaster which had resulted from this phenomenon on the Malvern Hills; but, as I wished to be certain that I had committed no great error in natural philosophy, I submitted the passage in which the description is contained, to my friend Sir David Brewster, who readily put his imprimatur upon it; and, as a piece of mere writing, it obtained more credit than it deserved, and more, certainly, than it would have obtained had I not been greatly favoured and assisted by my excellent good mistress, Dame Nature, who, while I was dictating the passage, treated me with a most magnificent storm upon the Eildon Hills, dazzling my own eyes as they were stretched wide to mark all the incidents, and somewhat startling my worthy amanuensis, by the lurid glare that ever and anon flashed over the paper under his hands.

In reading over the work, I found various errors, some of which were evidently attributable to my own carelessness, and to an utter distaste and inaptitude for the correction of the press; others to those bearers of many sins, the printers. Of these faults I have now removed a considerable number, but doubtless a fully

sufficient portion yet remains to make me crave the indulgence of the reader for these, as well as many other errors, and to beg him to consider what a sleepy and stupifying task it is for an author to read his own works, and wherever he does find an omission, to fancy that my eyes have there been unwillingly closed (after stout resistance) by a page every word of which I knew better than the first line of the hornbook.

I have only to add, that this work was the first that I ever dictated, my lamented friend Sir Walter Scott having suggested to me that plan of composition shortly before, as a great alleviation of literary labour. For that suggestion, as well as for many another act of kindness, I owed him deep gratitude, which never can be forgotten. Ever since, I have been enabled to pursue my course with comparatively few of the inconveniences from which most authors suffer; and I attribute to the hint then given, the enjoyment of a much greater share than I could reasonably expect of that most invaluable blessing, health.*

* In publishing this new edition of my works, circumstances, which would be uninteresting to the public, as they refer only to the bookselling business, have induced me to deviate from the order in which the works were originally composed. A learned and very judicious friend has suggested, that, to facilitate the arrangement of the volumes according to the dates of the first publication, if any purchasers should be inclined to adopt that plan, I should give a list of my romances in the order of their composition. I have found more difficulty in framing such a list than might be expected; but one shall be given with a succeeding volume.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

The Author of this work thinks it right to acknowledge, that, if there be anything interesting in the following pages, he is but little entitled to claim it as his own, almost all the principal incidents being narrated in the works of George Chatelain, Jean Molinet, Philippe de Comines, and in the Chronicles of Flanders. Amongst the incidents which he has introduced from such authentic sources, he might cite the embassy of Olivier le Dain, the expedition of the Duke of Gueldres against Arras, the massacre of the Magistrates of Ghent, and especially the death of the Counsellors in the very presence of the Princess Mary,—some writers asserting that their blood absolutely sprinkled her garments.

Doubtless, the learned and judicious antiquary and critic may be inclined to point out, that the character of the hero of the revolt is a creation of the author's own imagination; and that we have no historical proof that he was actuated, or rather torn, by the contending passions which are here represented as continually struggling against each other in his bosom, and by turns conquering one another.

One fact, however, is certain,—that no human being now living can possibly have such means of knowing what were the

real feelings of the individual alluded to, as the author of these volumes; and he therefore trusts that the public will receive them as true, upon his authority.

It only remains farther to be explained, that the magistracy of the city of Ghent formerly consisted of the Grand Bailli, aided by thirteen Eschevins, three Pensioners, and six Secretaries; inferior to whom were the Lieutenant Bailli, thirteen Eschevins, one Pensioner, and four Secretaries. Whenever the States General of the province assembled at Ghent, which was most frequently the case, the chief Pensioner, or the chief Eschevin of the city, claimed, as a right, the presidency of the Estates. Besides this body of magistrates, and the general assembly of the States, the provincial council of the sovereign generally held its seat in Ghent; at least, such was the case from the year 1463 to the year 1579. It most frequently consisted of five Counsellors and a President, but the numbers changed from time to time; and during the early part of the reign of Mary its powers were almost null.

As the language of the court and the nobility in Flanders was at that time French and all the principal authorities are only to be found in that language, the writer of the following pages has preserved the names of offices, persons, and things, as he found them, in that tongue, without seeking at all, to inflict upon those who are kind enough to read his book, the necessity of studying a Flemish vocabulary for that purpose.

MARY OF BURGUNDY:

OR,

THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

CHAPTER I.

It was on the evening of a beautiful day in the beginning of September, 1456,—one of those fair autumn days that wean us, as it were, from the passing summer, with the light as bright, and the sky as full of rays, as in the richest hours of June; and with nothing but a scarce perceptible shade of yellow in the woods to tell that it is not the proudest time of the year's prime.—It was in the evening, as I have said; but nothing yet betokened darkness. The sun had glided a considerable way on his descent down the bright arch of the western sky, yet without one ray being shadowed, or any lustre lost. He had reached that degree of declination alone, at which his beams, pouring from a spot a little above the horizon, produced, as they streamed over forest and hill, grand masses of light and shade, with every here and there a point of dazzling brightness, where the clear evening rays were reflected from stream or lake.——

It was in the heart of a deep forest, too, whose immemorial trees, worn away by time, or felled by the axe, left in various places wide open spaces of broken ground and turf, brushwood and dingle—and amidst whose deep recesses a thousand spots rich in woodland beauty lay hidden from the eye of man. Those were not, indeed, times when taste and cultivation had taught the human race to appreciate fully all the charms and magnificence wherewith Nature's hand has robed the globe which we inhabit;

and the only beings that then trod the deeper glades of the forest were the woodman, the hunter, or those less fortunate persons who,—as we see them represented by the wild pencil of Salvator Rosa,—might greatly increase the picturesque effect of the scenes they frequented; but, probably, did not particularly feel it themselves. But there is, nevertheless, in the heart of man, a native sense of beauty, a latent sympathy, a harmony with all that is lovely on the earth, which makes him unconsciously seek out spots of peculiar sweetness, not only for his daily dwelling, but also for both his temporary resting place, and for the mansion of his long repose, whether the age or the country be rude or not.

Look at the common cemetery of a village, and you will generally find that it is pitched in the most picturesque spot to be found in the neighbourhood. If left to his free will, the peasant will almost always—without well knowing why—build his cottage where he may have something fair or bright before his eyes; and the very herd, while watching his cattle or his sheep, climbs up the face of the crag, to sit and gaze over the fair expanse of Nature's face.

It was in the heart of a deep forest, then, at the distance of nearly twenty miles from Louvain, that a boy, of about twelve years of age, was seen sleeping by the side of a small stream; which, dashing over a high rock hard by, gathered its bright waters in a deep basin at the foot, and then rushed, clear and rapidly, through the green turf beyond. The old trees of the wood were scattered abroad from the stream, as if to let the little waterfall sparkle at its will in the sunshine. One young ash tree, alone, self-sown by the side of the river, waved over the boy's head, and cast a dancing veil of chequered light and shade upon features as fair as eye ever looked upon.

At about a hundred yards from the spot where he was lying, a sandy road wound through the savannah, and plunged into the deeper parts of the wood. On the other side, however, the ground being of a more open nature, the path might be seen winding up the steep ascent of a high hill, with the banks, which occasionally flanked it to the east, surmounted by long lines of tall overhanging trees.

A rude bridge of stone, whose ruinous condition spoke plainly how rarely the traveller's foot trod the path through the forest, spanned over the stream at a little distance. And the evening light, as it poured in from the west, caught bright upon the coun-

tenance of the sleeping boy, upon the dancing cascade above his head, upon many a flashing turn in the river, and, after gilding the ivy that mantled the old bridge, passed on to lose itself gradually in the gloom of the deep masses of forest-ground beyond.

The dress of the sleeper accorded well with the scene in which he was found; it consisted of a full coat, of forest-green, gathered round his waist by a broad belt, together with the long tight hose common at the period. In his belt was a dagger and knife; and on his head he had no covering, except the glossy curls of his dark brown hair. Though the material of his garments was of the finest cloth which the looms of Ypres could produce, yet marks of toil, and even of strife, were apparent in the dusty and torn state of his habiliments.

He lay, however, in that calm, deep, placid sleep, only known to youth, toil, and innocence. His breath was so light, and his slumber was so calm, that he might have seemed dead, but for the rosy hue of health that overspread his cheeks. No sound appeared at first to have any effect upon his ear, though, while he lay beside the stream, a wild, timid stag came rustling through the brushwood to drink of its waters, and suddenly seeing a human thing amidst the solitude of the forest, bounded quick away through the long glades of the wood. After that, the leaves waved over him, and the wind played with the curls of his hair for nearly half an hour, without any living creature approaching to disturb his repose. At the end of that time, some moving objects made their appearance at the most distant point of the road that was visible, where it sunk over the hill. At first, all that could be seen was a dark body moving forward down the descent, enveloped in a cloud of dust; but, gradually, it separated into distinct parts, and assumed the form of a party of armed horsemen. Their number might be ten or twelve; and, by the slowness of their motions, it seemed that they had already travelled far. More than once, as they descended the slope, they paused, and appeared to gaze over the country, as if either contemplating its beauty, or doubtful of the road they ought to take. These pauses, however, always ended in their resuming their way towards the spot which we have described. When they at length reached it, they again drew the rein; and it became evident, that uncertainty, with regard to their onward course, had been the cause of their several halts upon the hill.

"By my faith, Sir Thibalt of Neufchatel," said one of the horsemen, who rode a little in advance of the others, "for Marshal of Burgundy, you know but little of your lord's dominions. By the holy Virgin, methinks that you are much better acquainted with every high road and by-path of my poor appanage of Dauphiny. At least, so the worthy burghers of Vienne were wont to assert, when we would fain have squeezed the double crowns out of their purses. It was then their invariable reply, that the Marshal of Burgundy had been upon them with his lances, and drained them as dry as hay—coming no one knew how, and going no one knew where."

The man who spoke was yet, not only in his prime, but in the early part of that period of life which is called middle age. There was no peculiar beauty in his countenance, nor in his person; there was nothing, apparently, either to strike, or to please. Yet it was impossible to stand before him, and not to feel one's self—without very well knowing why—in the presence of an extraordinary man. There was in his deportment to be traced the evident habit of command. He spoke, as if knowing that his words were to be obeyed. But that was not all; from underneath the overhanging penthouse of his thick eyebrows, shone forth two keen grey eyes, which had in them a prying, inquisitive cunning, which seemed anxiously exerted to discover at once the thoughts of those they gazed upon, before any veil, of the many which man uses, could be drawn over motives or feelings, to conceal them from that searching glance.

Those given to physiognomy might have gathered, from his high and projecting, but narrow forehead, the indications of a keen and observing mind, with but little imagination, superstition without fancy, and talent without wit. The thin, compressed lips, the naturally firm-set posture of the teeth, the curling line from the nostril to the corner of the mouth, might have been construed to imply a heart naturally cruel, which derived not less pleasure from inflicting wounds by bitter words than from producing mere corporeal pain. His dress, at this time of his life, was splendid to excess; and the horse on which he rode showed the high blood that poured through its veins, by a degree of fire and energy far superior to that exhibited by the chargers of his companions, though the journey it had performed was the same which had so wearied them.

As he spoke the words before detailed, he looked back to

a gentleman, who rode a step or two behind him on his right hand; and on his countenance appeared, what he intended to be, a smile of frank, good-humoured raillery. The natural expression of his features mingled with it nevertheless, and gave it an air of sarcasm, which made the bitter, perhaps, preponderate over the sweet.

The person to whom he addressed himself, however, listened with respectful good humour. "In truth, my lord," he replied, "so little have I dwelt in this part of the duke's dominions, that I know my way less than many a footboy. I once was acquainted with every rood of ground between Brussels and Tirlemont; but, God be thanked, my memory is short, and I have forgotten it all, as readily as I hope you, sir, may forget certain marches in Dauphiny, made when Louis the Dauphin was an enemy to Burgundy, instead of an honoured guest."

"They are forgotten, Lord Marshal, they are forgotten," replied the Dauphin, afterwards famous as Louis XI., "and can never more be remembered but to show me how much more pleasant it is to have the lord of Neufchatel for a friend rather than an enemy. But, in Heaven's name," he added, changing the subject quickly, "before we go farther, let us seek some one to show us the way, or let us halt our horses here, and wait for the fat citizens of Ghent, whom we left on the other side of the river."

His companion shook his head with a doubtful smile, as he replied, "It would be difficult, I trow, to find any guide here, unless Saint Hubert, or some other of the good saints, were to send us a white stag with a collar of gold round his neck, to lead us safely home, as the old legends tell us they used to do of yore."

"The saints have heard your prayer, my lord," cried one of the party who had strayed a little to the left, but not so far as to be out of hearing of the conversation which was passing between the other two; "the saints have heard your prayer; and here is the white stag, in the form of a fair boy in a green jerkin."

As he spoke, he pointed forward with his hand towards the little cascade, where the boy, who had been sleeping by its side, had now started up,—awakened by the sound of voices, and of horses' feet,—and was gazing on the travellers, with anxious eyes, and with his hand resting on his dagger.

"Why, how now, boy!" cried the Dauphin, spurring up

towards the stream. "Thinkest thou that we are Jews, or cut-throats, or wild men of the woods, that thou clutchest thy knife so fearfully? Say, canst thou tell how far we are from Tirlemont?"

The boy eyed the party for several moments ere he replied. "How should I know whether you be cut-throats or not?" he said, at length; "I have seen cut-throats in as fine clothes.—How far is it from Tirlemont? As far as it is from Liege or Namur."

"Then, by my troth, Sir Marshal," said the Dauphin, turning to his companion, "our horses will never carry us thither this night. What is to be done?"

"What is the nearest town or village, boy?" demanded the Marshal of Burgundy. "If we be at equal distances from Namur and Liege and Tirlemont, we cannot be far from Hannut."

"Hannut is the nearest place," answered the boy; "but it is two hours' ride for a tired horse."

"We will try it, however," said the Marshal; and then added, turning to the Dauphin, "the lord of the castle of Hannut, sir, though first cousin of the bad Duke of Gueldres, is a noble gentleman as ever lived; and I can promise you a fair reception. Though once a famous soldier, he has long cast by the lance and casque; and, buried deep in studies—which churchmen say are hardly over holy—he passes his whole time in solitude, except when some ancient friend breaks in upon his reveries. Such a liberty I may well take.—Now, boy, tell us our road, and there is a silver piece for thy pains."

The boy stooped not to raise the money which the Marshal threw towards him, but replied eagerly, "If any one will take me on the croup behind him, I will show you easily the way.—Nay, I beseech you, noble lords, take me with you; for I am wearied and alone, and I must lie in the forest all night if you refuse me."

"But dost thou know the way well, my fair boy?" demanded the Dauphin, approaching nearer, and stooping over his saddle-bow to speak to the boy with an air of increasing kindness. "Thou art so young, methinks thou scarce canst know all the turnings of a wood like this. Come, let us hear if thy knowledge is equal to the task of guiding us?"

"That it is," answered the boy at once. "The road is as easy to find as a heron's nest in a bare tree. One has nothing to do

but to follow on that road over the bridge, take the two first turnings to the right, and then the next to the left, and at the end of a league more the castle is in sight."

"Ay," said the Dauphin, "is it so easy as that? Then, by my faith, I think we can find it ourselves.—Come, Sir Marshal, come!" And, so saying, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and cantered over the bridge.

The Marshal of Burgundy looked back with a lingering glance of compassion at the poor boy thus unfeelingly treated by his companion. But, as the Prince dashed forward and waved his hand for him to follow, he rode on also, though not without a muttered comment on the conduct of the other, which might not have given great pleasure had it been vented aloud. The whole train followed; and, left alone, the boy stood silent, gazing on them as they departed, with a flushed cheek and a curling lip. "Out upon the traitors!" he exclaimed, at length. "All men are knaves; yet it is but little honour to their knavery, to cheat a boy like me."

The train wound onward into the wood, and the last horseman was soon hidden from his eyes: but the merry sound of laughing voices, borne by the wind to his ear for some moments after they were out of sight, spoke painfully, how little interest they took in his feelings or situation.

He listened till all was still, and then, seating himself on the bank of the stream, gazed vacantly on the bubbling waters as they rushed hurriedly by him; while the current of his own thoughts held as rapid and disturbed a course. As memory after memory of many a painful scene and sorrow—such as infancy has seldom known—came up before his sight, his eyes filled, the tears rolled rapidly over his cheeks, and, casting himself prostrate on the ground, he hid his face amongst the long grass, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

He had not lain there long, however, when a heavy hand, laid firmly on his shoulder, caused him once more to start up; and, though the figure which stood by him when he did so, was not one whose aspect was very prepossessing, yet it would be difficult to describe the sudden lightning of joy that sparkled in his eyes through the tears with which they still overflowed.

The person who had roused him from the prostrate despair in which he had cast himself down, was a middle-sized, broad-made man, with long sinewy arms, and a chest like that of a

mountain-bull. He might be nearly forty years of age; and his face, which had once been fair,—a fact which was vouched alone by his light brown hair, and clear blue eye,—had now reached a hue nearly approaching to the colour of mahogany, by constant exposure to the summer's sun and the winter's cold. There was in it, withal, an expression of daring hardihood, softened and, as it were, purified by a frank, free, good-humoured smile, which was not without a touch of droll humour. His garb at once bespoke him one of those vagrant sons of Mars, with whom war, in some shape, was a never-failing trade;—a class of which we must speak more hereafter, and which the abuses of the feudal system, the constant feuds of chieftain with chieftain, and the long and desolating warfare between France and England, had at that time rendered but too common in every part of Europe. He was not, indeed, clothed from head to heel in cold iron, as was customary with the knight or man-at-arms when ready for the field; but there was quite a sufficient portion of old steel about his person, in the form of arms both offensive and defensive, to shew that hard blows were the principal merchandise in which he traded.

He laid his large hairy hand, as I have said, firmly and familiarly on the boy's shoulder; and the expression of the young wanderer's countenance, when he started up, and beheld the person who stood near him, at once showed, not only that they were old acquaintances, but that their meeting was both unexpected and joyful.

"Matthew Gournay!" exclaimed the boy, "good Matthew Gournay, is it you, indeed? Oh, why did you not come before? With your fifty good lances, we might yet have held the castle out, till we were joined by the troops from Utrecht; but now all is lost—the castle taken, and my father——"

"I know it all, Master Hugh," interrupted the soldier—"I know it all, better than the paternoster. Bad news flies faster than a swallow; so I know it all, and a good deal more than you yourself know. You ask, why I did not come, too. By our Lady, for the simplest reason in the world—because I could not. I was lying like an old rat in a trap, with four stone walls all round about me, in the good city of Liege. Duke Philip heard of the haste I was making to give you help, and cogged with the old bishop—may his skull be broken!—to send out a couple of hundred *reîters* to intercept us on our march.—What

would you have? We fought like devils, but we were taken at a disadvantage, by a superior force. All my gallant fellows were killed or dispersed; and at last, finding my back against a rock, with six spears at my breast, and not loving the look of such a kind of toasting-fork, I agreed to take lodging in the town prison of Liege."

"But how got you out, then?" demanded the boy; "did they free you for good-will?"

"Not they," replied Matthew Gournay: "they gave me cold water and hard bread, and vowed every day to stick my head upon the gate of the town, *as a terror to all marauders*, as they said. But the fools showed themselves rank burghers, by leaving me my arms; and I soon found means to get the iron bars out of the windows, ventured a leap of thirty feet, swam the ditch, climbed the wall, and here I am in the forest of Hannut—But not alone, Master Hugh. I have got a part of my old comrades together already, and hope soon to have a better band than ever. The old seneschal, too, from the castle, is with us, and from him we heard all the bad news. But, though he talked of murder and putting to death, and flaying alive, and vowed that everybody in the castle had been killed but himself, I got an inkling from the old charcoal-burner's wife, at the hut in the wood, of how you had escaped, and whither you had gone. So, thinking, as you were on foot and alone, that you might want help and a horse, I tracked you like a deer to this place: for your father was always a good friend to me in the time of need; and I will stand by you, Master Hugh, while I have a hand for my sword, or a sword for my hand."

"Hark!" cried the boy, almost as the other spoke; "there's a bugle on the hill! It must be the duke's butchers following me."

"A bugle!" cried the soldier; "a cow's horn blown by a sow-driver, you mean. None of the duke's bugles ever blew a blast like that, something between the groaning of a blacksmith's bellows and the grunting of a hog. But there they are," he continued, "sure enough, lances and all, as I live. We must to cover, Hugh, we must to cover! Quick—thy hand, boy—they are coming down, straggling like fallow deer!"

So saying, Matthew Gournay sprang up the high bank, in falling over which the little stream formed the cascade we have noticed; and, as he climbed the rock himself, he assisted, or

rather dragged up after him, his young companion, whose hand he held locked in his own, with a grasp which no slight weight could have unbent.

For a moment, they paused on the top of the crag, to take another look at the approaching party, and then plunged into the long shrubs and tangled brushwood that clothed the sides of the winding glen, down which the stream wandered previous to its fall.

CHAPTER II.

The party, whose approach had interrupted the conversation of Matthew Gournay and his young companion, were not long before they reached the little open spot in the forest, from which they had scared the other two; and, as it was at that point that their road first fell in with the stream, they paused for a moment, to water their horses ere they proceeded. Their appearance and demeanour corresponded well with the peculiar sound of the horn which they had blown upon the hill; for though the instrument which announced their approach was martial in itself, yet the sounds which they produced from it were anything but military; and though swords and lances, casques and breastplates, were to be seen in profusion amongst them, there was scarcely one of the party who had not a certain burgher rotundity of figure, or negligence of gait, far more in harmony with furred gowns and caps *à la mortier* than with war-steeds and glittering arms.

The first, who paused beside the stream, had nearly been thrown over his horse's head, by the animal suddenly bending his neck to drink; and it was long before the rider could sufficiently compose himself again in the saddle, to proceed with some tale which he had been telling to one of his companions, who urged him to make an end of his story, with an eagerness which seemed to show that the matter was one of great interest to him at least.

"Well-a-day, Master Nicholas, well-a-day!" cried the discomposed horseman, "let me but settle myself on my stool—saddle, I mean. God forgive me! but this cursed beast has pulled the bridle out of my hands.—So ho! Bernard, so ho!—there, there, surely thou couldst drink without bending thy head so low."

While he thus spoke, by a slow and cautious movement,—not unlike that with which a child approaches a sparrow, to perform the difficult manœuvre of throwing salt upon its tail,—he regained a grasp of the bridle-rein which the horse had twitched out of his hand, and then went on with his story,—interrupting it, however, every now and then, to address sundry admonitions to his horse,—somewhat in the following style:—

"Well, where was I, worthy Master Nicholas?—I was saying—so ho! beast! The devil's in thee, thou wilt have me into the river.—I was saying that, after the castle was taken, and every soul put to the sword, even the poor boy, Hugh,—for which last, I hear, the duke is very much grieved,—be quiet, Bernard, hold up thy head!—Count Adolphus himself fled away by a postern-door, and is now a prisoner in——"

"Nay, but, Master Martin, you said they were all put to death," interrupted one of his companions.

"Remember what the doctors say," replied the other; "namely, that there is no general rule without its exception. They were all killed but those that ran away, which were only Count Adolphus and his horse, who got away together, the one upon the other. Fool that he was to trust himself upon a horse's back! It was his ruin, alack! it was his ruin."

"How so?" demanded Master Nicholas; "did the horse throw him and break his pate? Methought you said, but now, that he was alive and a prisoner."

"And I said truly, too," answered the other. "Nevertheless, his mounting that horse was the cause of his ruin; for though he got off quietly enough, yet, at the bridge below Namur—where, if he had had no horse, he would have passed free—he was obliged to stop to pay pontage* for his beast. A priest, who was talking with the toll-man, knew him; and he was taken on the spot, and cast into prison."

"Methinks it was more the priest's fault than the horse's, then," replied Master Nicholas; "but whoever it was that betrayed him, bad was the turn they did to the city of Ghent; for, what with

* Philip de Comines, who relates this anecdote much in the same terms as those used by good Martin Fruse in the text, places it, however, several years later; though, from the period of time during which Adolphus Duke of Gueldres, here called Count Adolphus, was kept in prison by the Duke of Burgundy, it would seem that the time of his capture is here correctly stated.

his aid, and that of the good folks of Gueldres, and the worthy burghers of Utrecht, we might have held the proud duke at bay, and wrung our rights from him drop by drop, like water from a sponge."

"God knows, God knows!" replied Martin Fruse, the burgher of Ghent, to whom this was addressed; "God knows! it is a fine thing to have one's rights, surely; but, somehow, I thought we were very comfortable and happy in the good old city, before there was any quarrel about rights at all. Well I know, we have never been happy since; and I have been forced to ride on horseback by the week together; for which sin, my flesh and skin do daily penance, as the chirurgeons of Namur could vouch if they would. Nevertheless, one must be patriotic, and all that, so I would not grumble,—if this beast would but give over drinking, which I think he will not do before he or I drop down dead. Here, horse-boy, come and pluck his nose out of the pool; for I cannot move him more than I could the town-house."

The worthy burgher was soon relieved from his embarrassments; and his horse being once more put upon the road, he led the way onward, followed by the rest of the party, with their servants and attendants. The place of leader was evidently conceded to good Martin Fruse; but this distinction was probably assigned to him, more on account of his wealth and integrity, than from the possession of fine wit, great sense, energetic activity, or any other requisite for a popular leader. He was, in truth, a worthy, honest man, somewhat easily persuaded, especially where his general vanity, and, more particularly, his own opinion of his powers as a politician, were brought into play: but his mind was neither very vigorous nor acute; though sometimes an innate sense of rectitude, and a hatred of injustice, would lend energy to his actions, and eloquence to his words.

Amongst those who followed him, however, were two or three spirits of a higher order; who, without his purity of motives, or kindly disposition, possessed far greater talents, activity, and vigour. Nevertheless, turbulent by disposition and by habit, few of the burghers of Ghent, at that time, possessed any very grand and general views, whether directed to the assertion of the liberties and rights of their country, or to the gratification of personal ambition. They contented themselves with occasional tumults, or with temporary alliances with the other states and

cities in the low countries, few of which rested long without being in open rebellion against their governors.

One of the party, however, which accompanied good Martin Fruse must not pass unmentioned; for, though at that time acting no prominent part, he exerted considerable influence, in after days, on the fortunes of his country. He was, at the period I speak of, a bold, brave, high-spirited boy; by no means unlike the one we have seen sleeping by the cascade, though perhaps two or three years older. He was strong and well proportioned for his age, and rode a wild young jennet, which, though full of fire, he managed with perfect ease. There was something, indeed, in the manner in which he excited the horse into fury, gave it the rein, and let it dash free past all his companions, as if it had become perfectly ungovernable; and then, without difficulty, reined it up with a smile of triumph,—which gave no bad picture of a mind conscious of powers of command, ambitious of their exercise, and fearless of the result. How this character of mind became afterwards modified by circumstances, will be shown more fully in the following pages.

In the meanwhile, we must proceed with the train of burghers as they rode on through the wood; concerting various plans amongst themselves, for concealing from the Duke of Burgundy the extent of their intrigues with Adolphus of Gueldres and the revolted citizens of Utrecht, for excusing themselves on those points which had reached his knowledge, and for assuaging his anger by presents and submission. The first thing to be done, before presenting themselves at his court, was, of course, to strip themselves of the warlike habiliments in which they had flaunted, while entertaining hopes of a successful revolt. For this purpose, they proposed to avoid the high road either to Brussels or Louvain; and as most of them were well acquainted with the country through which they had to pass, they turned to the left, after having proceeded about a mile farther on their way, and put spurs to their horses, in order to get out of the forest before nightfall, which was now fast approaching.

The way was difficult, however, and full of large ruts and stones, in some places overgrown with briers, in some places interrupted by deep ravines. Here, it would go down so steep a descent, that slowness of progression was absolutely necessary to the safety of their necks; there, it would climb so deep a hill, that whip and spur were applied to increase the speed of their beasts in vain.

As they thus journeyed on, making but little way, the bright rosy hue which tinged the clouds above their heads showed that the sun was sinking beneath the horizon's edge: the red, after growing deeper and deeper for some time, began to fade away into the grey; each moment the light became fainter and more faint; and, at length, while they had yet at least three miles of forest ground to traverse, night fell completely over the earth.

The darkness, however, was not so deep as in any degree to prevent them from finding their way onward, or from distinguishing the objects round about them, although it lent a mysterious sort of grandeur to the deep masses and long dim glades of the forest, made the rocks look like towers and castles, and converted many a tree, to the eyes of the more timid, into the form of an armed man.

After having gone on in this state for about half an hour,—just a sufficient time, indeed, to work up every sort of apprehension to the utmost, yet not long enough to familiarize the travellers with the darkness, and when every one was calling to mind all the thousand stories—which were, in those days, alas! too true ones—of robbers, and murderers, and free plunderers,—the whole party plunged down into a deep dell, the aspect of which was not at all calculated to assuage their terrors, whether reasonable or foolish. Not, indeed, that it was more gloomy than the road through which they had been lately travelling; rather, on the contrary. Whatever degree of light yet remained in the heavens found its way more readily into that valley, where the trees were less high, and at greater intervals from each other, than into the narrow road which had led them thither, the high banks of which were lined all the way along with tall and overhanging beeches. The sort of dingle, however, which they now entered, was clothed with low but thick shrubs; and no means of egress whatever appeared, except by climbing some of the steep ascents which surrounded it on every side.

There was a small piece of level ground at the bottom, of about a hundred yards in diameter; and the moment they had reached the flat, the word "Halt!" pronounced in a loud and imperative voice, caused every one suddenly to draw his bridle rein with somewhat timid obedience, though no one distinguished who was the speaker.

The matter was not left long in doubt. A dark figure glided

from the brushwood across their path; half a dozen more followed; and the glistening of the faint light upon various pieces of polished iron, showed that there was no lack of arms to compel obedience to the peremptory order they had received to halt.

As the persons who obstructed the way, however, seemed but few in number, one of the more bellicose of the burghers called upon his companions to resist. His magnanimity was suddenly diminished by a long arm stretched from the bushes beside him, which applied the stroke of a quarter-staff with full force to his shoulders; and though a cuirass, by which his person was defended, protected him from any serious injury, yet he was thrown forward upon his horse's neck, with a sound very much resembling that produced by the falling of an empty kettle from the hands of a slovenly cook. All were now of one opinion, that, whatever might have been the result of resistance to the more open foes before them, it was useless to contend with such invisible enemies also, especially as those that *were* visible were gradually increasing in numbers; and worthy Martin Fruse led the way to a valorous surrender, by begging the gentlemen of the forest "to spare them for God's sake."

"Down from your horses, every one of you!" cried the rough voice which had commanded them to halt, "and we shall soon see what stuff you are made of."

The citizens hastened to obey; and, in the terror which now reigned completely amongst them, strange were the attitudes which they assumed, and strange was the tumbling off, on either side of their beasts, as they hurried to show prompt submission to the imperious command they had received. In the confusion and disarray thus produced, only one person of all their party seemed to retain full command of his senses; and he was no other than the boy we have before described, who, now taking advantage of a vacancy he saw in the ranks of their opponents, dashed forward for a gap in the wood, and had nearly effected his escape. He was too late, however, by a single moment: his bridle was caught by a strong arm, before he could force his way through; and his light jennet, thrown suddenly upon its haunches, slipped on the green turf, and rolled with her young master on the ground.

"By my faith," said the man who had thus circumvented him, "thou art a bold young springal; but thou must back with

me, my boy;" and so saying, he raised him, not unkindly, from the earth, and led him to the place where his companions stood.

The burghers and their attendants—in all, about ten in number—were now divested of their arms, offensive and defensive, by the nameless kind of gentry into whose hands they had fallen. This unpleasant ceremony, however, was performed without harshness; and, though no resistance of any kind was offered, their captors abstained, with very miraculous forbearance, from examining the contents of their pouches, and from searching for any other metal than cold iron. When all this was completed, and the good citizens of Ghent, reduced to their hose and jerkins, stood passive, in silent expectation of what was to come next,—not at all unlike a flock of sheep that a shepherd's dog has driven into a corner of a field,—the same hoarse-voiced gentleman, who had hitherto acted as the leader of their assailants, addressed them in a bantering tone:—"Now, my masters, tell me truly," he cried, "whether do ye covet to go with your hands and feet at liberty, or to have your wrists tied with cords till the blood starts out from underneath your nails, and your ankles garnished in the same fashion?"

The answer of the citizens may well be conceived; and the other went on in the same jeering manner:—"Well, then, swear to me by all you hold holy and dear——but stay!—First tell me who and what ye are, that I may frame the oath discreetly; for each man in this world holds holy and dear that which his neighbour holds foolish and cheap."

"We are poor unhappy burghers of Ghent," replied Martin Fruse, who, though at first he had been terrified to a very undignified degree, now began to recover a certain portion of composure,—"we are poor unhappy burghers of Ghent, who have been seduced by vain hopes of some small profit to ourselves and our good city, to get upon horseback. Alack! and a well-a-day! that ever honest, sober-minded men should be persuaded to trust their legs across such galloping, uncertain, treacherous beasts."

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted the man who had addressed him; "as I live by sword and dagger, it is good Martin Fruse coming from Namur. Well, Martin, the oath I shall put to thee is this,—that by all thy hopes of golden florins, by all thy reverence for silks and furs and cloths of extra fineness, by thy gratitude to the shuttle and the loom, and by thy respect and love for a fine

fleece of English wool, thou wilt not attempt to escape from my hands, till I fix thy ransom and give thee leave to go."

Martin Fruse very readily took the oath prescribed, grateful in his heart for any mitigation of his fears, though trembling somewhat at the name of ransom, which augured ill for the glittering heaps which he had left at home. His comrades all followed his example, on an oath of the same kind being exacted from each; but when it was addressed to the youth who accompanied them, a different scene was acted. He replied boldly, "Of cloths and furs I know nothing, but that they cover me, and I will not take such a warehouse vow for the best man that ever drew a sword."

"How now, how now, Sir Princox!" cried Martin Fruse; "art thou not my nephew, Albert Maurice? Take the oath this gentleman offers thee, sirrah, and be well content that he does not strike off thy young foolish head."

"I will swear by my honour, uncle," replied the boy, "but I will never swear by cloth and florins, for such a vow would bind me but little."

"Well, well, thy honour will do," said the leader of their captors; "though, by my faith, I think we must keep thee with us, and make a soldier of thee; for doubtless thou art unworthy of the high honour of becoming a burgher of Ghent."

The sneering tone in which this was spoken expressed not ill the general feeling of contempt with which the soldiers of that day looked upon any of the milder occupations of life. Whatever kindness they showed towards the citizen,—which was at times considerable,—proceeded solely from sensations approaching compassion, or from considerations of self-interest. They looked upon the burgher, indeed, as a sort of inferior animal, whose helplessness gave it some claim upon their generosity; and such was probably the feeling that prompted the mild and indulgent manner in which the body of roving adventurers who had captured the Gandois travellers, marshalled their prisoners in rank, and led them away from the high road—where, though improbable, such a thing as an interruption might accidentally have taken place—to the deeper parts of the forest, in which silence and solitude seemed to reign supreme.

This part of the arrangement, however, was not at all to the taste of good Martin Fruse; and though he certainly did not venture any opposition, yet, while led along, together with his

companions, by fifteen or sixteen armed and lawless men, it was with fear and trembling that he rolled his eyes around upon the dark and dreary masses of wood, down the long profound glades, in which nothing was to be distinguished, and over the wild and broken rocks, which every now and then burst through their covering of trees and shrubs, and towering up into the sky, caught upon their brows the first rays of the rising moon, invisible to those who wandered through the forest at their foot.

The scene was altogether a great deal too sublime and picturesque for his taste; and he could not help thinking, as he walked unwillingly along, how admirably fitted was the place, into which he was led, for committing murder, without fear of discovery. Then would he picture to his own mind, his body left exposed beneath the green-wood trees, to be preyed on by the ravens, and beaten by the wintry showers; and his heart would melt with tender compassion for himself, when he thought, how all his good gossips of Ghent would, in years to come, tell the lamentable story of worthy Martin Fruse, and how he was murdered in the forest of Hannut, to the wondering ears of a chance guest, over a blazing fire, in the midst of the cold winter.

He had nearly wept at the pitiful images he had called up of his own fate, in his own mind; but, before he reached that point, a distant neighing met his ear. The horses on which he and his companions had ridden, and which were led after them by their captors, caught the sound also, and answered in the same sort; and in a few minutes more, a bright light began to gleam through the wood, which proved, on their farther advance, to proceed from a watch-fire, by the side of which a bird of the same feather with those who had captured them, was lying asleep. He started up, however, on their approach; and by the congratulations which passed mutually between him and his comrades, it became evident to Martin Fruse, that a party of citizens of Ghent was a rich prize in the eyes of the freemen of the forest. It is true that he would rather have had his worth appreciated in a different manner; but the sight of the fire cheered his heart, and a sumpter horse, which the good burghers had brought with them, being led forward and relieved of its burden, the various stores of provision with which it was loaded were spread out upon the grass, and called up more genial ideas in the mind of the citizen than those which had hitherto accompanied him on his way through the forest. The

pleasures of this new subject of contemplation, indeed, were for a few minutes disturbed, by apprehension lest the captors should proceed to divide the spoil of the panniers, without assigning any part to the original proprietors. But this source of uneasiness was soon removed; and, on being made to sit down by the fire, and invited frankly and freely to partake of all the good things once his own, the heart of Martin Fruse expanded with joy, the character of robber acquired a dignity and elevation in his eyes which it had never before possessed; and deriving from fat cold capon and excellent wine both present satisfaction and anticipations of future good treatment, he gave himself up to joy, and began to gaze round upon the faces of his new comrades with every inclination to be pleased.

CHAPTER III.

Leaving the worthy burgher and his companions in the forest, we must change the scene for a while, and bring the reader into the interior of one of the feudal mansions of the period. The room into which we intend to introduce him was small in size; and, being placed in a high, square tower, attached to the castle of Hannut, it took the exact form of the building, except inasmuch as a portion was taken off the western side, for the purpose of admitting a staircase, on which, indeed, no great space was thrown away. The furniture of the room was small in quantity, and consisted of a few large chairs of dark black oak, (whose upright backs of almost gigantic height were carved in a thousand quaint devices,) together with two or three settles or stools, without any backs at all, a silver lamp, hanging by a thick brass chain from the centre of a roof, formed into the shape of a tent by the meeting of a number of grooved arches, and a small black cabinet, or closet, one of the doors of which stood open, displaying within, in splendid bindings of crimson velvet, what might in that day have been considered a most precious library, comprising about forty tomes of manuscript.

Besides being decorated by these articles of furniture, the room was adorned with fine hangings of old tapestry; but the

principal object in the whole chamber was a table and reading desk, of some dark-coloured wood, on which were displayed, wide open, the broad vellum leaves of a richly illuminated book. The table, and its burden, were placed exactly beneath the silver lamp already mentioned, which threw a strong but flickering light upon the pages of the work; and a chair which stood near seemed to show that somebody had recently been reading.

The person who had been so employed, however, had by this time ceased; and having risen from his seat, was standing beside an open casement, pierced through the thick walls at such a height from the floor, as just to enable him to lean his arm upon the sill of the window, and gaze out upon the scene beyond.

Through this open casement, at the time I speak of, the bright stars of a clear autumn night might be seen twinkling like diamonds in the unclouded sky; the sweet, warm westerly wind, breathing of peace and harvest from the plains beyond, sighed over the tops of the tall forest trees, and poured into the window just raised above them; and some faint streaks of light to the west told that day had not long departed. The person who gazed over the wide expanse commanded by the tower, was a tall, strong man, of perhaps a little more than forty years of age, with a forehead somewhat bald, and hair which had once been black, but which was now mingled thickly with grey; while his beard, which was short and neatly trimmed, had become almost white. His complexion was of a pale, clear brown, without a tinge of red in any part except his lips; and, as he gazed out upon the sky, there was a still calm spread over every feature, which, together with the bloodless hue of his skin, would have made his countenance look like that of the dead, had not the light of his large deep brown eye told of a bright and living soul within. We must take leave to look for a moment into his bosom as he stood in his lonely study, gazing forth upon the sky.

"And are those clear orbs," he thought, as with his glance fixed upon the heavens he saw star after star shine forth,—"and are those bright orbs really the mystic prophets of our future fate? Is yon the book on which the Almighty hand has written in characters of light the foreseen history of the world he has created? It may be so: nay, probably it is; and yet how little do we know of this earth that we inhabit, and of yon deep blue vault that circles us around. The peasant, when he hears

of my lonely studies, endues my mind, in his rude fancy, with power over the invisible world, and all the troops of spirits that possibly throng the very air we breathe; and kings and princes themselves send to seek knowledge and advice from my lips, while I could answer to peasant and to king, that all my powers do not suffice to lay the spirit of past happiness from rising before my eyes, and all my knowledge does not reach to find that sovereign elixir: consolation for the fate of man. All that I have learned teaches me but to know, that I have learned nothing; to feel that science, and philosophy, and wisdom are in vain; and that, hidden mysteriously within the bosom of this mortal clay, is some fine essence, some distinct being, which, while it participates in the pleasures and affections of the earthly thing in which it lies concealed, thirsts for knowledge beyond the knowledge of this world, and yearns for joys more pure, and loves more unperishable than the loves and joys of this earth can ever be. Oh, thou dear spirit, that in the years past I have seen look forth upon me from the eyes of her now gone; surely, if ever the immortal being came back to visit the earth on which it once moved, thou wouldst not have left me so long to solitude.—No, no," he added aloud, "it is all a dream!

"And yet," he thought, after a pause, "the powers with which the vulgar mind invests me are not all in vain: they give me at least corporeal peace—repose from all the turbulent follies—the wild whirling nothings, which men call pleasure, or business, or policy—more empty, more unimportant, in relation to the grand universe, than the dancing of the myriad motes in the sunshine of a summer's day. They give me peace—repose. I am no longer called upon, with an ash staff, or bar of sharpened iron, to smite the breast of my fellow-men, in some mad prince's quarrel. I am no longer called upon to take counsel with a crowd of grey-beard fools, in order to steal a few roods of dull heavy soil from the dominions of some neighbouring king. No, no; the very superstitious dread in which they hold me gives me peace; ay, and even power—that phantom folly of which they are all so fond; and be it far from me to undeceive them."

Thus thought the Lord of Hannut; and, like most men, in some degree he cheated himself in regard to his own motives. Doubtless, the predominating feelings of his heart were such as he believed them to be. But, besides those motives on which he suffered his mind to rest, there mingled with the causes of

his conduct small portions of the more ordinary desires and passions which minds of a very elevated tone are anxious to conceal even from themselves. Learned beyond any one, perhaps, of his age and country, the Lord of Hannut was not a little proud of his knowledge; but when we remember the darkness of the times in which he lived, we shall not wonder that such learning tended but little to enlighten his mind upon the deep and mysterious subjects, which the height of human knowledge has but discovered to be beyond its ken. Judicial astrology, in that day, was held as a science, of the accuracy of which, ignorance alone could be permitted to doubt; and the belief that a superhuman agency was not only continually but visibly at work in the general affairs of this world, was both a point of faith with the vulgar, and a point admitted by many of the most scientific. Magic and necromancy were looked upon as sciences. In vain Friar Bacon had written an elaborate treatise to prove their nullity: he himself was cited as an instance of their existence; and many of the most learned were only deterred from following them openly, by the fear of those consequences which rendered their private pursuit more interesting from the degree of danger that accompanied it.

Although magic, properly so called, formed no part of his studies, the reputation of dabbling in that imaginary science was not disagreeable to the Lord of Hannut; nor was it alone the desire of obtaining peace and repose, which rendered the awe not unpleasing, wherewith both the peasantry of the neighbourhood, and his fellow nobles throughout the land regarded him; but, mingling imperceptibly with the current of other feelings, gratified vanity had its share also. Nor, indeed, though he affected to despise the world and the world's power, did the influence that he exercised upon that world displease him. Perhaps, too, that influence might be the more gratifying, because it was of an uncommon kind; and though, doubtless, true philosophy, and a just estimate of the emptiness of this earth's pleasures and desires, might have a considerable share in the distant solitude which he maintained, the pride of superior knowledge had its portion, too, of the contempt with which he looked upon the generality of beings like himself. Much true benevolence of heart and susceptibility of feeling, with a considerable degree of imaginative enthusiasm, were, in fact, the principal features of his character; yet his reasoning powers also

were strong and clear, and very superior to those of most men in the age in which he lived; but, as we sometimes see, these various qualities of his mind and heart rather contended against than balanced each other.

In his early youth, the enthusiasm and the susceptibility had ruled almost alone. The din of arms, the tumult of conflicting hosts, the pomp and pageant of the listed field, all had charms for him. The natural strength of his frame, and the skill and dexterity given by early education, had made many of the best knights in Europe go down before his lance, and had obtained for him that degree of glory and applause which in those days was sure to follow and encourage feats of arms, and which might have kept him for life one of the rude but gallant champions of the day. But then came love,—love of that deep, powerful, engrossing nature, which a heart such as his was alone capable of feeling. The cup of happiness was given to his lip but for a moment; he was suffered to drink, one deep, short draught; and, when he had tasted all its sweetness, it was dashed from his hand, never to be filled again. From that moment his life had passed in solitude, and his days and nights had been occupied by study: nor, had he above once, for more than twelve years, passed the limits of that forest, over which his eyes were now cast.

As he leaned upon the window-sill, and gazed out upon the sky, pondering over the strange mystery of man's being, and the lot which fate had cast him, the last faint lingering rays of twilight were withdrawn from the air, and night fell upon one half of the world; but it was one of those bright, clear, splendid nights, which often come in the beginning of autumn, as if the heavens loved to look, with all their thousand eyes, upon the rich harvest and the glowing fruit. After he had gazed for some time, the eastern edge of the heavens began to grow lighter, and the clear yellow moon, waxing near her full, rose up, and poured a tide of golden light over the immense extent of green leaves and waving boughs spread out beneath his eyes. All was still, and solemn, and silent, and full of calm splendour, and tranquil brightness. There was not a motion, there was not a sound, except the slow gliding of the beautiful planet up the arch of heaven, and the whispering of the light wind, as it breathed through the boughs of the trees.

Suddenly, however, a dull, faint noise was heard at some dis-

tance; which went on increasing slowly, till the sound of horses' feet could be distinguished, broken occasionally by the tones of a human voice, speaking a few words of order or inquiry. The Lord of Hannut listened, and when the horsemen came nearer, he gathered, from an occasional sentence, spoken as they wound round the foot of the tower in which he was standing, that the party were directing their course to the gates of his own dwelling. His brow became slightly clouded; and though hospitality was a duty, at that time never neglected, yet so rarely was he visited by strangers, and so little did he court society, that he paused somewhat anxiously to think of how he might best receive them. To throw the gates of a castle open to all comers, was not indeed at all safe in those days; and though the Lord of Hannut was, at that time, at feud with no one, and though his personal character, the strength of his castle, and the number of his retainers, secured him against the free companions and plunderers of the times, it was not, of course, without pause and examination, that any large body of men were to be admitted within the walls at such an hour of the night. He remained, however, musing somewhat abstractedly, till the horsemen, whom he had heard below, had wound along the road, which, following the various sinuosities of the walls and defences of the castle, skirted the brow of the hill on which it stood, and was only interrupted by the gate of the barbacan on the northern side of the building.

Before it the travellers paused; and the sound of a horn winded long and clearly, gave notice to the denizens of the castle that admittance was demanded by some one without. Still the master of the mansion remained in thought, leaving to the prudence and discretion of his seneschal the task of receiving and answering the travellers; and the sound of a falling drawbridge, with the creaking of its beams, and the clanging and clash of its rusty chains, followed by the clatter of horses' feet in the court-yard, soon announced that a considerable number of cavaliers had obtained admission. Many voices speaking were next heard, and then, after a pause of comparative silence, a slow step echoed up the long hollow staircase, which led to the chamber we have already described. At that sound the Lord of Hannut withdrew from the window, and seating himself before the book in which he had been lately reading, fixed his eyes upon the door. There

might be a slight touch of stage effect in it,—but no matter,—what is there on this earth without its quackery?

Scarcely had he done so, when some one knocked without, and, on being desired to come in, presented, at the half-opened door, the weather-beaten face of an old soldier, who acted the part of seneschal, bearing a look of apprehension, which sat ill upon features that seemed originally destined to express any thing but fear.

"Come in, Roger, come in!" cried the Lord of Hannut. "Art thou fool enough, too, to think that I deal with evil spirits?"

"God forbid, my lord!" replied the man. "But ill should I like to see a spirit of any kind, good or evil; and, therefore, I always like to have the room clear before I intrude."

"Well, what would you now?" demanded his lord, with somewhat of impatience in his manner. "Wherefore do you disturb me?"

"So please you, sir," replied the seneschal, "a noble traveller just alighted in the court below, with a small but gallant train, consisting of——"

"On with thy tale, good Roger!" interrupted his master. "What of the traveller? Leave his train to speak for themselves hereafter."

"So please you, my lord," continued the other, "he bade me tell you that an old tried friend, Thibalt of Neufchatel, craved your hospitality for a single night."

"Thibalt of Neufchatel!" exclaimed the other, his face brightening for a moment with a transitory expression of pleasure, and then turning deadly pale, as the magic of memory, by the spell of that single name, called up the scenes of the painful past with which that name was connected. "Thibalt of Neufchatel! an old tried friend, indeed! though sad was the day of our last meeting. Where is he? Lead the way!"

Thus saying, the Lord of Hannut, without waiting for the guidance of his seneschal, proceeded, with a rapid step, towards the great hall of the castle, concluding, as was really the case, that into that place of general reception the travellers had been shown on their arrival. It was an immense gloomy apartment, paved with stone, occupying the whole interior space at the bottom of the chief tower. At one end was the great door, which opened at once into the court; and at the other was a high

pointed window, not unlike that of a cathedral. Arms, of every kind then in use, decorated the walls in profusion. On the right side, as you entered from the court, was the wide open hearth, with stools and benches round about; and so wide and cool was the chamber, that at the time I speak of,—though a night in the early part of September,—an immense pile of blazing logs sparkled and hissed in the midst, casting a red and flickering glare around, which, catching on many a lance, and shield, and suit of armour on the opposite wall, lost itself in the gloom at either end of the hall, and in the deep hollow of the vault above.

A cresset—hung by a chain from the centre of the roof,—added a degree of light, which, however, was confined to the part of the hall in the immediate vicinity of the lamp; and, within its influence, disencumbering themselves of some of the habiliments of the road, were seated the party of travellers just arrived, at the moment that the Lord of Hannut entered. He came in by a small door behind one of the massy pillars which supported the vault, and advanced at once towards his guests. The sound of his footstep caused them all to rise, but the Marshal of Burgundy immediately advanced before the rest to meet his friend. When within a few steps of each other, both stopped, and looked with a countenance of doubt and surprise on the face of the other. Each had forgotten that many years had passed since they last met, and each had pictured to himself the image of his friend as he had before seen him, in the pride of youth and health; but, when the reality was presented to them, both paused in astonishment to gaze upon the effects of Time's tremendous power, which they mutually presented to each other. Nor was their surprise at first unmingled with some degree of doubt as to the identity of the person before them with the friend from whom they had so long been separated.

"Good God!" exclaimed the Lord of Hannut, "Thibalt of Neufchatel!"

"Even so, Maurice of Hannut!" replied the Marshal. "Good faith, old friend, I scarcely should have known thee. But more of this hereafter," he added, hastily. "See, here is a mighty prince, the Lord Louis of Valois, who demands thy care and hospitality for this night, as under my safe conduct, he journeys to visit his noble cousin, our sovereign, the Duke of Burgundy."

The Lord of Hannut bowed low at this intimation of the

high quality of one of his guests, and proceeded to welcome the son of the reigning monarch of France, with that grave and stately dignity which the early habits of the court and camp had given to his demeanour. The forms and ceremonies of that day, which would be found dull enough even to practise at present, would appear still duller in writing than they would be in act; and, therefore, passing over all the points of etiquette which were observed in the reception and entertainment of the Dauphin, the supper that was laid before him, and the spiced wines that were offered him at his bedside, we will continue for a moment in the great hall, which, after he retired to rest, remained occupied by the few attendants who had accompanied himself and the Marshal of Burgundy thither, and by the usual servants and officers of the Lord of Hannut.

The presence of their superiors had restrained for a time all free communication amongst these worthy personages; but, between the squire of the body to the Marshal of Burgundy, and the seneschal of the Lord of Hannut, had passed many a glance of recognition, and a friendly, though silent, pinch of the arm during supper; and no sooner was Louis of Valois safely housed in his chamber, and his companion, the Lord of Neufchatel, closeted with the master of the mansion, than a conversation commenced between two of the followers, a part of which must be here put down as illustrative of those past events, which, in some degree, however slight, affect the course of this true history.

"What, Roger de Lorens!" cried the squire of the Marshal, "still hanging to the skirts of thy old lord? Do I find thee here at the end of twelve long years?"

"And where could I be better, Regnault of Gand?" replied the other. "But thou thyself, old friend, art thou not at the same skirts too as when last I saw thee? How is it, that after such long service thou art not yet a knight?"

"Why, in good faith, then," replied the squire, "it is that I am too poor to do honour to knighthood, and too wise to covet a state that I have not the means to hold. I have made money in the wars on an occasion too, like my neighbours; but, alack, friend Roger, no sooner does the right hand put the money in, than the left hand filches it out again.—And is it, then, really twelve long years since we met? Lord, Lord! it looks but yesterday, when I think of those times; and yet when I count up all the things I have done since, and make old Memory notch them

down on her tally, it seems like the score of a hundred years more than twelve. I remember the last day we ever saw each other; do you?"

"Do you think I could ever forget it?" said the other. "Was it not that day when the pleasure-house of Lindenmar was burned to the ground, and our good lord's infant was consumed in the flames?"

"I remember it well," replied the other, musing over the circumstances of the past; "and I remember that my lord and Adolph of Gueldres, and all the rest of the nobles that were marching to join the duke, saw the flames from the road; and all came willingly to help your gallant young lord.—He was gallant and young then.—But Adolph of Gueldres cried to let them all burn, so that the lands of Hannut might come to him. He said it laughing, indeed; but it was a bitter jest at such a minute."

"My lord heard of that soon enough," answered the seneschal, "and he never forgave it."

"Oh, but we heeded him not," exclaimed the other: "we all gave what aid we could. Mind you not, how my lord rushed in and brought out your lady in his arms, and how she wept for her child? It was but a fortnight old, they say!"

"No more, no more!" answered the other: "and I will tell you what, she never ceased to weep till death dried up her tears—poor thing!—But, hark thee, Regnault," he added, taking the other by the arm, and drawing him a few paces aside, not only out of earshot of the rest of the persons who tenanted the hall, but also out of the broad glare of the lamp, as if what he was about to say were not matter for the open light:—"but, hark thee, Regnault de Gand! they do say that the spirits of that lady and her child visit our lord each night in his chamber at a certain hour."

"Didst thou ever see them, good Roger?" demanded his companion, with a smile of self-satisfied incredulity. "Didst thou ever set eyes upon them, thyself?"

"God forbid!" ejaculated the seneschal, fervently; "God forbid! I would not see them for all the gold of Egypt."

"Well, then, good Roger, fear not," replied Regnault de Gand, "thou shalt never see them! I have heard a mighty deal of spirits, and ghosts, and apparitions, and devils; but though I have served in the countries where they are most plenty, I never could meet with one in the whole course of my life; and between

us two, good Roger, I believe in none of them; except, indeed, all that the church believes, and the fourteen thousand virgin martyrs."

"Why, that is believing enough in all conscience," replied Roger de Lorens; "but if you believe in no such things, I will put you to sleep in the small room at the stairs' foot, just beneath my lord's private chamber."

Whether this proposal was relished much or little by the worthy squire, he had made too open a profession of his incredulity to shrink from the test; and he was fain to take up his abode for the night in a low-roofed, but not inconvenient chamber, at the foot of the staircase in the square tower. He looked somewhat pale as his old companion bade him Good night; but he looked a vast deal paler the next day when they wished each other Good morning. Not one word, however, did he say, either of objection at first, or of comment at last; and no one ever exactly knew how he sped during the night he passed in that chamber, though, when some months after he married a buxom dame of Ghent, a report got about amongst the gossips, that though he had not actually encountered a spirit, he had heard many strange noises, and seen many a strange beam of light wandering about the apartment, coming he knew not whence, and disappearing he knew not whither.

He himself told nothing openly; and when the fair dame whom he had taken to his bosom, and who was supposed to be deeply learned in all the secrets thereof, was spoken to on the subject, she, too, affected a tone of mystery, only assuring the ingenious gossip, who tried to ferret out the details, with a solemn shake of the head, "that those might disbelieve the apparition of spirits who liked. As for her husband, Regnault, he had good cause to know better; though he had once been a scoffer, like all the rest of your swaggering, gallant, dare-devil men-at-arms."

Having now violated, in some degree, the venerable art of chronology, and, in favour of the worthy squire, run somewhat forward before the events of my tale, I must beg the reader to pause on his advance for a single instant; and, while the Dauphin, the Marshal, and their respective trains, sleep sound in the massy walls of the castle of Hannut, to return with me to the party we lately left assembled round a fire in the heart of the forest.

CHAPTER IV.

From the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth centuries, and even, perhaps, to a much later period, there existed, spread over the whole continent—equally in France, in Flanders, in Italy, and in Germany—a particular class of men, whose livelihood was obtained by the sword, and by the sword alone. In time of hostility, they were soldiers; in time of peace, they were plunderers; and long habituated to reap alone the iron harvest of war, they never dreamed of turning the sword into the reaping-hook—a sort of proceeding which they would have considered the basest degradation of an instrument which they held in as high a degree of veneration, as that in which it was regarded by the ancient Scythians.

In the interior of France, indeed, such a thing as peace was sometimes to be found: but Germany, and its frontiers towards France, presented such a number of great vassals, and independent princes, each of whom had the right of waging war against his neighbour—a right which they took care should not fall into desuetude—that the mercenary soldiers, who at that time infested the world, were rarely, for any long period, under the necessity of cultivating the arts of peace, even in their own peculiar manner, in the heart of the green forest.

During the earlier part of the great struggle between France and England, these men had assembled in bodies of thousands and tens of thousands; and, during the existence of any of the temporary suspensions of hostilities, which took place from time to time, they seized upon some town or castle, lived at free quarters in the country, and laid prince and peasant, city and village alike, under contribution. Gradually, however, these great bodies became scattered; kings found it more imperatively necessary to overcome such internal foes, than to oppose an external enemy. The nobles also leagued together to destroy any of the great bands that remained; but the smaller ones—tolerated at first as a minor evil, consequent upon the system of warfare of the day—were always in the end encouraged, protected, and rewarded, when hostilities between any two powers rendered their services needful to each; and were not very severely treated, when circumstances compelled them to exercise their military

talents on their own account. Scarcely a great lord through Germany, or Burgundy, or Flanders, had not a band of this kind—more or less formidable, according to his wealth and power—either in his pay, or under his protection. The character of the adventurers, indeed, of each particular troop, greatly depended upon the disposition and manners of the lord to whom they were for the time attached: but, on the whole, they were a very much libelled people; and though in actual warfare they were certainly worse than the ordinary feudal soldier of the day, in time of peace they were infinitely better than the class of common robber, that succeeded upon their extinction. There were times, indeed, when, under the guidance of some fierce and ruthless leader, they committed acts which disgraced the history of human nature; but upon ordinary occasions, though they carried into the camp a strong touch of the plundering propensities of the freebooters, yet, when war was over, they bore with them, to the cavern or the wood, many of the frank and gallant qualities of the chivalrous soldier.

It was in the hands of a body of such men, though of a somewhat better quality than usual, that we last left Martin Fruse, the worthy burgher of Ghent, beginning to recover from the apprehensions which he had at first entertained, and to enjoy himself in proportion to the rapid transition he had undergone, from a feeling of terror to a sense of security. The balance of human sensation is so nicely suspended, that scarcely is a weight removed from the heart, ere up flies the beam, as far above as it was below; and long does it vibrate before it attains the equipoise. Such, I believe, are the feelings of every bosom: though some, ashamed of the sudden transition, have power enough to master its expression, and clothe themselves with external calmness, while their hearts are really as much agitated as those of other men. Not so, however, with good Martin Fruse: though, occasionally, in affairs of policy, he thought himself called upon to make a bungling attempt to give an air of diplomatic secrecy and caution to his language and manner; and though, when prompted by others, he could speak an equivocal speech, and fancy himself a skilful negotiator upon the faith of a doubtful sentence, yet, in general, the emotions of his heart would bubble up to the surface unrestrained. On the present occasion, as cold capon and rich ham, strong Rhenish and fruity Moselle, gave pledges of the most satisfactory kind for his future safety, his joy

sparkled forth with somewhat childish glee; and his good friends, the robbers, in the midst of the green forest, supplied, in his affections, the place of many a boon companion of the rich town of Ghent.

The stores of the sumpter-horse were soon nearly consumed; but it was remarked by the worthy burgher, that a portion which, by nice computation, he judged might satisfy the appetite of two hungry citizens, together with a couple of large flasks of the best wine, were set apart with reverential care, as if for some person who was not present, but who was held by his companions in a high degree of respect. After governing his curiosity for some time, that most unrestrainable of all human passions got the better of him; and, by some sidelong questions, he endeavoured to ascertain for whom this reservation was made.

"Oh no! no, no!" replied the personage, who had hitherto acted as the leader of the freebooters, "we must not touch that; it is put by for our captain, who will be here presently, and will tell us," he added, with a malicious grin, as he played upon the apprehensions of the good citizen,—"and will tell us what we are to do with thee and thine, good Master Martin Fruse. Thou art not the first syndic of the weavers, I trow, who has dangled from a beam; and one could not choose a more airy place to hang in, on a summer's day."

Though Martin Fruse perceived that there was a touch of jest at the bottom of his companion's speech, yet the very thought of dangling from a beam,—a fate which the Duke of Burgundy was fully as likely to inflict upon a rebellious subject, as the most ferocious freebooter upon a wandering traveller,—caused a peculiar chilly sensation to pucker up his whole skin: but, as his danger from the robbers was the more pressing and immediate of the two, he applied himself strenuously to demonstrate, that it was both unjust and unreasonable to hang a man either to beam or bough, after having abetted him in making himself very comfortable in the world in which God had placed him. There was something in the arguments he deduced from capon and hock, together with the terror that he evidently felt, and a degree of childish simplicity of manner, which made the freebooters roar with laughter; and they were just indulging in one of these merry peals, when a sudden rustle on the bank over their head gave notice that some one was approaching.

"Hold by the roots, boy!" cried a rough voice above. "Here!

Set your foot here.—Now jump,—as far as you can!—That's right! Cleared it, by St. George!—Now slip down. So here we are."

As he spoke the last words, Matthew Gournay, followed by young Hugh of Gueldres, stood within one pace of the spot where the freebooters had been regaling. Two or three of the latter had started up to welcome him, holding high one of the torches, to light his descent; and as he came forward, his eye ran over the evidences of their supper, and the party who had partaken of it, with some degree of surprise.

"How now, my merry men?" he cried, laughing. "Ye have had some sport, it would seem; but, by our Lady, I hope ye have left me a share, and something for this poor lad, who is dying of hunger."

"Plenty, plenty for both," replied many of the voices; "that is to say, enough for one meal at least; the next we must find elsewhere."

"But here are some Gandois traders," added one of the party, "waiting your awful decree, and trembling in every limb lest they should be hanged upon the next tree."

"God forbid!" replied Matthew Gournay. "We will put them to light ransoms, for rich citizens. Who is the first? Stand up, good man.—What! Martin Fruse!" he exclaimed, starting back, as the light fell upon the face of the burgher. "My old friend, Martin Fruse, in whose house I lodged when I came to teach the men of Ghent how to get up a tumult! Little did I think I should so soon have thee under contribution."

"Nay, nay, good Master Gournay," replied the burgher, "right glad am I to see thee. In truth, I thought I had fallen into worse hands than thine. I know well enough," he added, with a somewhat doubtful expression of countenance, notwithstanding the confidence which his words implied,—"I know well enough that thou hast no heart to take a ransom from thine old companion."

"Faith but thou art wrong, Martin," replied Matthew Gournay, laying his heavy hand upon the citizen's shoulder. "Thine own ransom shall be light, and that of thy comrades also, for thy sake; but something we must have, if it be but to keep up good customs. A trifle, a mere trifle—a benevolence, as our good kings call it in England, when they take it into their heads to put the clergy to ransom."

"Nay, but," said Martin Fruse, whose confidence and courage were fully restored by the sight of his friend's face;—"nay, but consider that I was taken while journeying for the sole purpose of conferring with thee and Adolph of Gueldres concerning the general rising we purposed."

"Well, well, we will speak further hereafter," answered Matthew Gournay. "That job is all over for the present; and as, doubtless, the duke has heard of our doings, it may go hard with your purses, and with my neck, if he catch us, which please God he shall not do. But we must think of some way of getting you all back to Ghent in safety. Now, Halbert of the hillside," he added, addressing one of his old band, who was probably an Englishman like himself, "hie thee to the midway oak. Thou wilt there find the old seneschal. Tell him all is safe! Bid him tarry there till to-morrow, collecting all our friends that come thither; and, in the meantime, to send me the leathern bottles from the hollow tree. These flimsy flasks furnish scarce a draught for a boy; and, good faith, I will be merry to-night, whatever befall to-morrow. Up the bank, up the bank," he continued; "'tis but a quarter of a mile that way."

While the messenger was gone in search of the fresh supply of wine which the leathern bottles implied, Matthew Gournay, and the young companion, whom he had brought with him, despatched the provisions which had been saved by the very miraculous abstinence of the freebooters; and at the same time the two flasks of Rhenish disappeared with a celerity truly astonishing. Four capacious bottles, holding about a gallon each, were soon after added to the supply, and all present were called upon to partake.

A scene of merriment and joy then succeeded, which would be impossible to describe—such, indeed, as perhaps no men ever indulged in whose lives were not held by so uncertain a tenure, whose moments of security were not counterbalanced by so many hours of danger, and whose pleasures were not bought by so many labours and pains, that it became their only policy to quaff the bowl of joy to the very dregs, while it was yet at their lips, lest, at the first pause, circumstance, that unkind step-dame, should snatch it angrily from their hands for ever. The final explosion of their merriment was called forth by good Martin Fruse, who, after showing many signs and symptoms of weary drowsiness, declared that he should like to go to bed, and asked, with much simplicity, where he was to sleep.

"Sleep!" exclaimed Matthew Gournay, "sleep! Why where the fiend would you sleep?"

"I mean, where's your house, good Master Matthew Gournay?" rejoined Martin Fruse, with open eyes, from which all expression was banished by surprise at finding his question a matter of laughter, he knew not why. "It 's all very well to sup in the wood in a fine summer night; but it 's growing late and cold, and I do think we had better a great deal get us to our warm beds."

The only answer which he received to this speech, from the robbers, was a new peal of laughter; but, at the same moment, his nephew plucked him by the sleeve, exclaiming, "Hist, uncle! ye only make the knaves grin; you may sleep where you are, or not sleep at all for this night. Have you not heard how these men covet no covering but the green boughs of the forest?"

"Thou art somewhat malapert, young sir," said Matthew Gournay, fixing upon him a glance into which various parts of the boy's speech, not very respectful to the freebooters, had called up a degree of fierceness that was not the general expression of his countenance;—"thou art somewhat malapert; and, if thy uncle follow my advice, he will make thy shoulders now and then taste of the cloth-yard measure, else thou wilt mar his fortune some fine day. The boy says true, however, good Martin; here sleepest thou this night, if thou sleepest at all; so get thee under yonder bank, with that broad oak tree above thy head, to guard thee from the westerly wind, and thank Heaven thou hast so fair a canopy. There, wrap thy cloak about thee; ask God's blessing, and sleep sound. To-morrow I will wake thee early, to talk of what may best be done to speed thee on thy way in safety; for many of the duke's bands are about; and without we can get thee some good escort, thou art like to be in the same plight as the ass, who, running away from a dog, fell in with a lion."

Although Martin Fruse believed himself to be as wise as any man that ever lived, except King Solomon, he had a peculiar dislike, or rather, it may be called, a nervous antipathy, to the very name of an ass; but, when it was introduced, as on the present occasion, in the form of a simile, to exemplify his own situation, his feelings were wounded in a deep degree. In silent indignation, therefore, for he knew not what to reply, he arose, and proceeded to the spot pointed out, where, having made himself as comfortable as circumstances permitted him to do, he lay

down, and, notwithstanding a firm determination not to close an eye, he was soon pouring forth a body of nasal music, which seemed intended to shame the nightingales for their silence in the autumn season.

The rest of the travellers took up with such couches as they could find; and the robbers, too, one by one, wrapped their cloaks about them, and resigned themselves to sleep. The two last who remained awake were Matthew Gournay and young Hugh of Gueldres, whose slumber by the cascade in the morning had sufficiently removed the weariness of his limbs, to leave his mind free to rest upon the sorrows of the past and the dangers of the present.

With him the leader of the freebooters held a long, and, to them, an interesting conversation; in the course of which the boy narrated all the events which had lately occurred to him,—the storming of his father's castle by the troops of Burgundy; the perils he had undergone; the difficulties of his escape; his desolation and despair when he found himself a wanderer and an outcast; his long and weary journey; his adventure with the Dauphin, whom he described as a French traveller; and the manner in which that base and artful prince had deceived him. He told it all with so much simple pathos, that he called up something very like a tear in the adventurer's clear blue eye; and Matthew Gournay, laying his broad hand affectionately on his head, exclaimed, "Never mind, my young lord, never mind; you are not without friends, and never shall be, so long as Matthew Gournay lives: for I swear by the blessed Virgin, and all the saints to boot, that my sword shall fight your quarrels, and my lance shall be at your command, till I see you a righted man. But, as you say that the Lord of Hannut is your cousin in the first degree, thither we must go for help and counsel. I know him well, too; for my good band helped to keep his castle for him, when the black riders were about last year: and what with the troops of spirits that folks say he can command, and the company of the good fellows that I shall soon gather together again, we shall be able to do something for you, no doubt. By the way," he added, seeming suddenly to bethink himself of some fact that had before escaped his attention, "these travellers, you say, are gone to Hannut too, and under their escort these Gandois weavers may pass unsuspected on their way homeward."

"What if they refuse to take them?" said Hugh of Gueldres.

"By the Lord, they shall eat more cold iron than they can well stomach," replied the adventurer: "but I must sleep, my young lord, I must sleep, if I would rise fresh to-morrow! Lend us thy hand to shift off this plastron." So saying, he disencumbered himself of his breastplate, and the other pieces of defensive armour which might have rendered his sleep uncomfortable; and, laying them down by his steel cap or basinet, which he had previously taken off, he wrapped the end of his mantle round his head, stretched himself on the ground, grasped the hilt of his dagger tight with his right hand; and, in that attitude, fell into as sound a sleep as if he had never tasted crime or heard of danger. The boy soon followed his example, and all was silence.

About an hour before daylight the following morning, Martin Fruse was awakened by some one shaking him by the shoulder. He roused himself with many a yawn, rose up, stretched his round limbs, which were sadly stiffened by a night's lodging upon the cold ground, and, gazing round, perceived, by the mingled light of the expiring fire and one or two pine-wood torches stuck in the ground, that the party of adventurers had been considerably increased during his sleep; and that they were now all busily employed in saddling horses and preparing for a march, except, indeed, Matthew Gournay himself, whose grasp it was that had awakened him. He was now informed, in a few brief words, without any precise explanation, that a means had suggested itself for sending him and his companions forward towards Ghent, with less danger than that to which they would be exposed in travelling alone. For this courtesy, and for the permission to return at all, Matthew Gournay exacted, under the name of ransom, a sum so much smaller than the fears of the worthy burgher had anticipated, that he only affected to haggle for a florin or two less, in order to keep up the custom of bargaining, so necessary to him in his mercantile capacity. A hint, however, from Matthew Gournay, that, if he said another word, the sum demanded should be tripled, soon set the matter at rest; and in a few minutes the whole party were on horseback, and on their way to the castle of Hannut.

On their arrival at the gate of the barbacan, they were instantly challenged by a sentry, who at that early hour stood watching the first grey streaks of the dawn. After various inquiries and messages to and from the interior of the castle, they were led

round to a small postern, and, being made to dismount, were led, one after another, by torchlight, up one of those narrow, almost interminable staircases, still to be found in every old building whose erection can be traced to the feudal period.

CHAPTER V.

It was after dinner on the following morning,—which meal, be it remarked, took place in those days about ten o'clock,—that the Dauphin and the Marshal of Burgundy rose to bid adieu to their noble host, and offered him, in courteous terms, their thanks for the hospitable entertainment he had shown them.

"I have, my lord, a favour to ask in return," said the Lord of Hannut, "which will leave me your debtor. The case is simply this: some worthy merchants of Ghent, travelling on mercantile affairs, as I am told, arrived here this morning; and, being fearful of encountering some of the robbers, who have given to this forest not the best repute, they are now waiting in the inner court, anxious to join themselves to your train, and accompany you as far as Cortenbergh, where they will leave you, and take the short cut to Ghent."

"Willingly, willingly," replied the Dauphin: "by my faith, if there be robbers in the wood, the more men we are, the better."

The Marshal of Burgundy looked somewhat grave. "I have heard rumours, my lord," he said, "that the men of Ghent, who, in my young day, when I frequented this part of the country, were as turbulent a race of base mechanics as ever drove a shuttle or worked a loom, have not forgotten their old habits, and from day to day give my lord the duke some fresh anxiety."

"Nay, nay," replied the Lord of Hannut; "these men are rich burghers, returning peacefully to their own city from some profitable excursion."

"Oh, let us have them, by all means!" exclaimed Louis, who possibly might have his own views, even at that time, in cultivating a good understanding with the people of Ghent. At least, we know that he never ceased to keep up some correspondence

with the burghers of the manufacturing towns of Flanders, from the time of his exile among them, to the last hour of his life. "Oh! let us have them by all means. Think of the robbers, my Lord Marshal! By my faith! I have too few florins in my purse to lose any willingly!"

The Marshal of Burgundy signified his assent by a low inclination of the head; though it was evident, from his whole manner, that he was not at all pleased with the new companions thus joined to his band; and would at once have rejected the proposal, had good manners towards his host, or respect towards the Dauphin, permitted him to make any further opposition.

"So necessary do I think caution against the freebooters, my lords," said the master of the mansion, as he conducted them towards the court-yard, where their horses stood saddled, "that I have ordered ten spears of my own to accompany you to the verge of the forest. They will join you at the little town of Hannut, about a quarter of a league distant; and will remain with you as long as you may think it necessary."

Louis expressed his gratitude in courtly terms; and the Lord of Neufchatel thanked his old friend more frankly; but said, he should like to see the boldest freebooter that ever was born, stand before the Marshal of Burgundy, though he had but four lances and four horseboys in his train. The party were by this time in the court-yard; and Louis greeted the burghers, whom he found waiting, with a familiar cordiality, well calculated to win their hearts, without diminishing his own dignity. The Marshal of Burgundy, on the contrary, spoke not; but looked on them with a grim and somewhat contemptuous smile; muttering between his teeth, with all the haughtiness of a feudal noble of that day, "The rascallion communes! they are dressed as proudly as lords of the first degree!"

Notwithstanding his offensive pride, yet untamed by years, the Lord of Neufchatel was far from treating the burghers with any real unkindness; and, after the whole party had mounted, and left the castle of Hannut, he gratified himself every now and then by a sneer, it is true; but, whenever any occasion presented itself for contributing to their comfort, or rendering them a substantial service, the natural courtesy of a chivalrous heart got the better of the prejudices of education. At an after period, indeed, he went still further, and greatly changed his demeanour towards the people of the towns; but at present, his pride

offended more than his services pleased; and when, after a quiet and uninterrupted journey, the two parties separated at Cortenbergh, though the Marshal left them as a set of men on whom he should never waste another thought, they remembered him long as one of those haughty tyrants whose insults and oppression often goaded the people into tumults, though the time was not yet come for a successful struggle for emancipation.

From Cortenbergh, the Dauphin and his companions rode on towards Brussels, sending forward a messenger to inform the Duke of Burgundy of their approach; but, before they reached the gates of the town, they received information that the prince whom they sought was even then in the field against the people of Utrecht. Nevertheless, as a safe asylum in Brussels was all that Louis demanded, he rode on upon his way; and, being admitted at once within the walls of the town, proceeded towards the palace. His coming had been notified to the Duchess Isabelle: and, on arriving at the barriers which at that time separated the dwelling of every prince or great noble from the common streets of the town, he found that princess, together with the young and beautiful Countess of Charolois—the wife of him afterwards famous as Charles the Bold—waiting to do honour to the heir of the French throne. No sooner did he perceive them, than, springing from his horse, he advanced with courtly grace, and gallantly saluted the cheek of every one of the fair bevy who had descended to welcome him; and then, offering his arm to the Duchess, wished to lead her into the palace. But this method of proceeding was not at all permitted by the mistress of the most ceremonious court, at that time, in Europe; and a series of formal courtesies began, and endured for a mortal half hour, such as would have slain any queen in modern Europe. At length, the resistance of the Duchess was vanquished by the Dauphin taking her by the hand, and thus leading her forward, as he exclaimed,—"Nay, nay, lady, you are over-ceremonious towards one who is now the poorest gentleman of all the realm of France, and knows not where to find a refuge, except with you and my fair uncle of Burgundy."

We might now pursue Louis XI. through all his cunning intrigues at the court of Burgundy: for, though then a young man, with the ardent blood of youth mingling strangely, in his veins, with the cold serpent-like sanies of policy, yet his nature was the same artful nature then that it appeared in after-years;

and treachery and artifice were as familiar to his mind while combined with the passions and follies of early life, as they were when connected with the superstitions and weaknesses of his age.

At present, however, it is neither with Louis nor with the Duke of Burgundy, nor with his warlike son, that we have principally to do, but rather with the young Countess of Charolois, then in that interesting situation when the hopes of a husband and a nation are fixed upon a coming event, which, with danger to the mother, is to give an heir to the throne and to the love of both sovereign and people.

The subjects of Burgundy watched anxiously, till at length, in the month of February, on St. Valentine's eve, was born Mary of Burgundy,—the only child that ever blessed the bed of Charles the Bold. The baptism was appointed to take place as soon as possible: and the Dauphin was invited to hold at the font, the infant princess, much of whose after-being his ambition was destined to render miserable. Now, however, all was joy and festivity; and magnificent presents, and splendid preparations, evinced how much the Flemish citizens shared, or would have seemed to share, in the happiness of their duke and his family. Even the people of Utrecht, so lately in rebellion, vied with Bruges and Brussels, Ghent and Ypres, in offering rich testimonies of their gladness; and Brussels itself was one scene of gorgeous splendour during the whole day of the christening. The centre of the great street, from the palace to the church of Cobergh, was enclosed within railings breast-high; and towards night, four hundred of the citizens, holding lighted torches of pure wax in their hands, were stationed along the line. A hundred servants of the house of Burgundy, furnished also with torches, lined the aisles of the church, and a hundred more were soon seen issuing from the palace gates, followed by as splendid a cortège as the world ever beheld. The Duchess of Burgundy herself, supported by the Dauphin, carried her son's child to the font; and all the nobles of that brilliant court followed on foot to the church.

It is not necessary here to describe the pompous ceremonies of that day, as they are written at full in the very elaborate account given by Eleonore of Poitiers. Suffice it to say, such joy and profusion never before reigned in Brussels. The streets of the city flowed with wine, and blazed with bonfires. Every rich

citizen gathered round his glowing hearth all the friends and relations of his house. Comfits and spiced hippocras fumed in every dwelling; and the christening of Mary of Burgundy became an epoch of rejoicing in the memory of men.

One event of that night, however, must be noticed. The fate of the city of Ghent, whose project of revolt had, in spite of all precautions, become known to the Duke Philip, had been left in the hands of the Count of Charolois, that prince's son; and a deputation from what were then called the three members of Ghent—that is to say,* from the burghers and nobles, from the united trades, and from the incorporation of weavers—were even then in Brussels, for the purpose of imploring mercy and forgiveness. The young Count, whose hasty and passionate nature was prone to be irritated by any thing that hurried or excited him, had been in such a state of fretful impatience during the preparations for the baptism of his child, that his wiser counsellors, who wished much that he should deal clemently with the Gandois, had concealed their arrival, in hopes of a more favourable moment presenting itself.

They were not, indeed, deceived in this expectation; and, after the ceremony was over, and all the splendour he could have wished had been displayed, without cloud or spot, on the christening of his child, the heart of the Count seemed to expand, and he gave himself up entirely to the joy of the occasion. His friends and attendants determined to seize the moment while this favourable mood continued. After the infant had been carried back from the church and presented to its mother, and after the cup and drageoir had been handed with formal ceremony to each of the guests, the Lord of Ravestein called the Prince's attention to a petition he held from his father's humble vassals, the citizens of Ghent; and seeing that he received the paper with a smile, he added the information that the deputies were even then waiting anxiously without, in what was termed the *chambre de parement.* The Count's brow instantly became clouded; but, without answering, he beckoned Ravestein, and several others, to follow him out of the Countess's chamber, in

* Although almost all the superficial books of modern date which refer to the ancient state of Ghent, speak of these three members or states, as the ecclesiastics, the nobles, and the commons, the statement in the text is correct, which may be ascertained by referring to the Chronicles of George Chatellain, ad ann. 1467.

which this conversation had taken place, and at once entered the apartment in which the burghers were assembled. There was something in the stern haste of his stride, as he advanced into the room, which boded little good to the supplicants; and his brow gave anything but a favourable presage.

The deputation consisted of about twenty persons, chosen from all ranks; and amongst them were two or three who had followed to the presence of the prince, from motives of curiosity, and a desire, for once, to see the splendours of a royal court, though the reception of the whole party was not likely to be very gratifying. Amongst the principal personages of the deputation appeared our good friend Martin Fruse, who had brought with him his nephew, Albert Maurice; and most of the other persons whom we have seen with him in the forest of Hannut bore him company also on the present occasion. Though the burghers of Ghent were sufficiently accustomed to harangue each other, either in the town-house or the market-place, and had a good conceit of their own powers of oratory, yet fear, which, of all the affections of the human mind, is the greatest promoter of humility, had so completely lessened their confidence in their own gift of eloquence, that, instead of intrusting the supplications they were about to make to one of their own body, they had hired a professional advocate, from a different town, to plead their cause before their offended prince.

"Range out, Messires, range out!" were the first ungracious words of the Count of Charolois; "range out, and let me see the lovely faces of the men who would fain have excited our father's subjects to revolt."

By his orders, the deputies from Ghent were arranged in a semicircle before him; and, according to etiquette, the whole party dropped upon one knee; though some went farther, and bent both to the ground. In the meantime, their advocate pronounced a long, florid, and frothy harangue, after the manner of that day, and calling David, Solomon, and many others, both sacred and profane, to his aid, as examples of clemency, besought the Count to show mercy to the repentant citizens of Ghent.

The heir of Burgundy appeared to give little attention to the studied and unnatural oration of the advocate, but continued rolling his eyes over the countenances of the supplicants, with a bent brow, and a smile, which—as a smile always proceeds from some pleasurable emotion—could only arise from the gratification

of pride and revenge, at the state of abasement to which he saw the revolted Gandois reduced.

When the orator had concluded, the Count replied,—"Men of Ghent, I have heard that in all time ye have been turbulent, discontented, factious, like a snarling cur that snaps at the hand that feeds it, but crouches beneath the lash: think not that you shall escape without due punishment; for know, that it is as much the duty of a prince to punish the criminal, as to protect the innocent."

He paused, and no one ventured to reply, except the boy Albert Maurice, who, grasping the hilt of the small dagger, which persons of almost all ages or ranks then wore, muttered, in a tone not quite inaudible, the words "Insolent tyrant."

Whether these words caught the hear of any one else or not, they were, at all events, loud enough to reach that of the Count of Charolois; and, taking one stride forward, he struck the youth a blow, with the palm of his open hand, which laid him almost senseless on the ground.

A momentary confusion now ensued; the nobles and attendants interposed, to prevent any farther act of unprincely violence; the boy was hurried away out of the room; several of the deputies made their escape, fearing the immediate consequences of the prince's fury; and the Count of Ravestein endeavoured to persuade his cousin, Charles of Burgundy, to quit the apartment, terrified lest he should proceed to measures which would throw the Gandois into open rebellion.

He was mistaken, however; the rage of the Count had evaporated in the blow he had struck; and, somewhat ashamed of the act of passion he had committed, he endeavoured to make it seem, both to himself and to those around him, not the effect of hasty wrath,—which it really was,—but the deliberate punishment of an insolent boy.

To Ravestein's remonstrances and entreaties for him to leave the apartment, he replied by a loud laugh, demanding, "Thinkest thou I could be moved to serious anger by a malapert lad like that? He spoke like a spoiled boy, and I have given him the chastisement suited to a spoiled boy: with these men of Ghent, I shall deal as towards men."

He was about to proceed, and was resuming the stern air with which he had formerly addressed the deputies, when the Dauphin, stepping forward, spoke to him in a low tone, as if to pre-

vent his intercession from being apparent, though his gesture and manner were quite sufficient to show the burghers that he was pleading in their behalf. The Count of Charolois had not yet learned all the intricate duplicity of Louis's character, and took it for granted that, while he interceded for the people of Ghent, he did really—as he affected to do—desire that they should be ignorant of his generous efforts in their favour.

"Well, be it so, my princely cousin," he replied, smoothing his ruffled brow; "the godfather of my child shall not be refused his first request to me, upon the very day of her baptism; but, by my faith! the honour of this good act shall rest where it is due,—with you, not with me. Know, men of Ghent, that you have a better advocate here, than this man of many words, whom you have brought to plead your cause. My noble cousin, Louis of France, condescends to intercede for you, and ye shall be pardoned upon the payment of a moderate fine. But, remember! offend not again; for, by the Lord that lives! if ye do, I will hang ten of each of your estates over the gates of the city. What have ye there?" he added, suddenly, pointing to some large objects, wrapped in violet-coloured linen, and carried by two or three stout attendants, who had followed the men of Ghent to the prince's presence; "what have ye there?"

"A humble offering, my lord the Count," replied Martin Fruse, rising from his knees, and walking towards the object which had attracted the attention of the Count of Charolois; "a humble offering from the city of Ghent to our noble Count, upon the birth of his fair daughter; though that foolish advocate forgot to mention all about it in his speech."

"Well for ye that he did so!" exclaimed the Count; "for had he attempted to bribe me to forget justice, I doubt much whether one of the deputies of Ghent would have quitted these palace walls alive."

"But only look at them, my lord the Count," said Martin Fruse, whose all-engrossing admiration of the rich presents they had brought made him insensible to the stern tone in which the prince had been speaking. "Only look at them; they are so beautiful;" and so saying, he removed the linen which covered them, and exposed to view three large and richly chased vases of massive silver. Certainly their effect upon all present very well justified the commendations which he had bestowed upon their beauty, and his censure of the advocate for not mentioning them before.

Both Charles of Burgundy and the Dauphin took an involuntary step forward, to look at them more nearly. But the eyes of Louis, who was fonder of the examination of the human heart, than of the finest piece of workmanship ever produced by the hands of man, were soon turned to the face of his cousin; and, as he marked the evident admiration which was therein expressed, he said, with a frank laugh, which covered well the sneer that was lurking in his speech,—"By my faith! fair cousin, I think the advocate *was* in the wrong."

"Good troth, but I think so too," replied the Count, joining in the laugh. "Well, my friends," he continued, addressing the deputies in a very different tone from that which he had formerly used; "get you gone, and be cautious for the future how ye listen to the delusive words of vain and ambitious men: the master of our household will see that ye are well entertained with white bread, good wine, and all the dainties of a christening; and as for the boy I struck," he added, taking a gold brooch or fermail from the bosom of his own vest, and putting it into the hands of Martin Fruse, "give him that to heal the blow. There, set down the vases on that table. We thank you for them; and by our faith! we will show them to our lady there within."

With many a lowly reverence the men of Ghent withdrew, very well satisfied to have obtained pardon on easy terms. Young Albert Maurice was found below, fully recovered from the blow he had received; but it was in no degree effaced from his memory. His uncle immediately presented him with the rich brooch which the Count had sent, never doubting but the boy would be delighted with the present; but, the moment he received it, he dashed it down upon the ground, and setting his foot upon it, trampled it to atoms.

What he muttered at the same time was unheard by any one but his uncle. The effect upon him, however, was such as to turn him deadly pale; and after having tasted of the Count's wine, that he might not be suspected of disaffection, he hurried his nephew away to the house of a friendly citizen of Brussels, miserable, to all appearance, till he had got the boy beyond the walls of the palace.

CHAPTER VI.

We have now concluded one period of our tale, and must beg the reader to leap boldly over nearly twenty years. In regard to the events which intervened, of some we shall here give a slight sketch before proceeding; some we shall leave to unravel themselves in the course of the after history.

Take any body of men, as many in number as the characters which we have introduced already, and it will be seldom found that, at the end of so great a lapse of time, the whole are still upon the busy stage of life; nevertheless, such was the case in the present instance. Time, the great enemy of man, and of all man's works, had not leagued himself with death against any of those whom I have particularly noticed. In other respects, however, he had not failed to do his accustomed work. The youth had grown up into the man; the man of middle age was bowed beneath the load of years; and the infant in the cradle had reached the blossoming days of womanhood.

Of her, then, whose birth and baptism we have just commemorated, we shall speak in the first place, before proceeding to notice the change which had occurred in the other characters which we have brought upon the scene. Her infancy passed in the midst of prosperity and happiness, while the territories which she was destined to inherit flourished under the dominion of her grandfather,—that wise and virtuous prince, who redeemed the errors of his early years by the generous patriotism of his latter days, and both merited and obtained, from neighbouring princes and his native subjects, the noble appellation of Philip the Good;—and while under the eye of her own gentle mother, her education proceeded in calm tranquillity, and her home reposed in peace.

Scarcely had she attained the age of ten years, however, ere, left alone under the guidance of a severe and imperious father, she found that, according to the common fate of those in the highest stations, her lot was to be anything but happy. Gentle, kind, obedient, she endeavoured, by making her inclinations the slaves of her father's will, to obtain, at least, peace, by yielding to duty. Her hopes and expectations were, nevertheless, in vain. The continual perils to which Charles the Bold exposed himself,

of course, kept his family in constant alarm and agitation; and the frequent and capricious changes of his policy, without obtaining for himself or his country any real advantage, only served to wring his daughter's heart.

After the death of his second wife, Isabel de Bourbon, the desire of a male heir induced him speedily to marry again; and the hatred which he had, by that time, conceived for Louis XI., made him choose for his bride, Margaret of York, the sister of the King of England. His hopes of a son were disappointed; but upon his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, his marriage conferred an inestimable benefit. Margaret of York fully replaced in kindness and affection the mother she had lost; and habituated early herself to cares, to sorrows, and to dangers, she instilled into the mind of her step-daughter that patient fortitude which she had acquired in so bitter a school; and taught her, in all circumstances, both to bear up against despair, and to endure without complaint.

As years rolled on, the hand of the undoubted heiress of all Burgundy and Flanders became, of course, an object of ambition to many of the princes of Europe; and from the time that Mary reached the age of fifteen, to obtain possession of her person, was a matter of open negotiation and subtle intrigue to all the neighbouring sovereigns. The brother of the King of France, the Duke of Calabria, the Prince of Tarentum, and the Duke of Savoy, became successively the suitors for her hand; and her father, to each and all, held out hopes and expectations, which he either never intended to fulfil, or found cause to disappoint. The most selfish of sovereigns, and, perhaps, of men, the feelings of his child were never consulted throughout the whole transactions which followed. He looked upon her simply as an object of policy—a human seal, which, at his will, was to be affixed to the charter of conveyance, destined to give to some neighbouring prince the succession to his vast dominions.

Luckily, however, it so happened, that Mary had made up her mind to her fate, and so guarded her own heart and feelings, that in her eyes all men seemed indifferent till the sanction of her father warranted the gift of her affections. Thus she beheld treaties commenced and broken, her hand promised and refused, without either pain or pleasure, till, at length, a suitor appeared, who, with all those advantages which could satisfy the political ambition of her father, possessed all those qualities of mind

and person calculated to gain her heart. Brave, chivalrous, and accomplished, graceful and well-formed in person, and handsome in features, Maximilian, son of the Emperor Frederick, displayed, at the same time, all that native kindness of heart, which, giving a gentle courtesy to the whole demeanour, is far more winning than the most splendid acquirements; and such qualities might have been quite sufficient to gain the heart of the heiress of Burgundy. Other things, indeed, were required by her father; but besides these personal qualities, he was the son of the richest monarch in Europe, the heir of the duchy of Austria, and would be, undoubtedly, successor to the imperial throne itself. Every object seemed attained by such an alliance; and when, after appearing for two years successively at the court of Burgundy, Maximilian demanded the hand of the beautiful heiress of the land, Mary, for the first time, heard with joy that it was promised to the new aspirant.

Long negotiations succeeded; and it was agreed that the duchy of Burgundy, freed from its homage to the crown of France, should be erected into an independent kingdom.

A grand meeting of the Imperial and Burgundian courts was appointed at Treves, for the conclusion of the marriage; and Charles the Bold, with his daughter, accompanied by a train of unrivalled splendour, set out for the place of rendezvous. Mary's heart beat high as she entered the ancient city; and now, taught to look upon Maximilian as her future husband, she yielded her whole heart to the influence of her first affection. But the greedy ambition of her father was destined to overthrow, for a time, all those airy fabrics of happiness, of which her hopes, and her imagination, had been the architects. Charles insisted that the title of King should be granted to him previous to his daughter's marriage; while the Emperor, who had watched his capricious changes on other occasions, with a jealous and somewhat indignant eye, refused to confer the title he sought, till the hand of the heiress of Burgundy was irrevocably bestowed upon his son. Charles argued, and railed, and threatened in vain; and at length the Emperor, wearied with his pertinacity, and offended by his intemperate violence, suddenly broke up his court, and left him, mad with rage and disappointment, to carry back his daughter to Brussels, with her heart bleeding in secret from the cruel wounds it had received.

Other negotiations succeeded with other princes; and though

Mary heard, with apprehension and terror, of each new proposal, the capricious uncertainty of her father's disposition saved her from the still bitterer pangs of yielding her hand to another, while her heart was really given to Maximilian.

In the meantime, disputes and wars took place; the projects of her marriage languished, or were abandoned; and while her father hastened to the last fatal field, where his military renown was extinguished in his blood, she remained with her gentle stepmother in Ghent, to weep the perils to which her parent's mad ambition exposed him, and to tremble at the sight of every packet that reached her from the Burgundian camp.

Such were the changes and events which had affected the fate of Mary of Burgundy, since we depicted her as an infant, born shortly after the arrival of the Dauphin at the court of Brussels. Over the Dauphin himself, greater alterations still had come in the course of passing years. From an exiled prince, he had become the king of a mighty nation; and time had stolen away all the graces of youth, and all those better feelings, and nobler emotions, which, in the freshness of early life, are more or less imparted to every human being, whatever may be the portion of selfish cunning added to neutralize them. However beneficial might be his policy to the country over which he ruled, however much his acts might advance the progress of society in Europe, and lead forward the world to a state of more general freedom and civilization, his objects were mean and personal, and individual ambition of the lowest kind was the motive for all his cunning schemes and artful policy. An immortal pen has, in our own day, portrayed his character with unequalled skill; and of Louis XI., at this period of his life, nothing farther can be said, than that he was the Louis XI. of Sir Walter Scott.

Of those who accompanied him on his journey, Thibalt of Neufchatel, Marshal of Burgundy, still remained—a weather-beaten warrior, and still, in a certain sense, a haughty noble. Though age, with its infirmities, had somewhat broken his strength, and had also softened his heart, he was ready at all times, nevertheless, to spring into the saddle at the trumpet's call: but so much, indeed, had he learned to look upon the inferior ranks with a milder eye, that he had become rather popular than otherwise; and amongst the peasants and burghers was generally known, at this time, by the name of good Count Thibalt. The taint of pride still remained; but its operation

was directed in a different manner; and young nobles, and new soldiers, who were not always inclined to pay as much respect to the old officer's opinion as he thought his due, now monopolized the scorn which he had formerly bestowed upon the citizens; while the degree of popularity he had lately acquired among the lower classes, and the deference with which they invariably treated him, contrasting strongly with the self-sufficient arrogance of some of his youthful compeers, soothed his pride, gratified his vanity, and made him, day by day, more bending and complacent to those whom he had formerly despised.

On good Martin Fruse, the passing of twenty years had brought, if not a green, at least a fat old age. He was not unwieldy, however; was rosy, and well respected amongst his fellow citizens for his wealth, for his wisdom, and for his many memories of the mighty past; and, in short, good Martin Fruse was, in person and appearance, a man who had gone happily through many changes, increasing in riches, honour, and comfort, with very few cares to prey upon his mind, and scarcely an ailment through life to shatter his body. As he had proceeded, however, experience had done its work: and while he had become wiser, and had really obtained a greater insight into affairs of policy, he had grown less vain, and willingly restrained his personal efforts, to composing the municipal squabbles of his native city, and directing the efforts of his townsmen for the extension of their commerce and the improvement of their manufactures.

His nephew, Albert Maurice, had been differently changed by the wand of the enchanter Time. His mind, indeed, was one of those firm, fixed, and steadfast essences, on which the passing of years make but little alteration, except by expanding their capabilities by the exercise of their powers. From a boy, it is true, he had grown into a powerful and handsome man; and though, in partnership with his uncle, he held the peaceful station of a rich merchant of Ghent, yet he was skilled in all military exercises; and, when the communes of Flanders had been called to the field, on pressing occasions, amongst the various struggles of that eventful period, he had shown knowledge, courage, and address, which had excited the wonder, and perhaps the jealousy, of many of those noble warriors who looked upon the trade of war as peculiarly their own. Whenever he returned home again, however, from the camp, he sunk at once

into the citizen; seemed to forget or to despise his military skill; and, though gay and splendid amongst his own class, far from courting popularity, he appeared to conceal, purposely, the deep thoughts and striking qualities of his mind. Once or twice, indeed, he had been heard to burst into an eloquent and indignant rebuke to some of the nobles, on the occasion of the haughty vexations which they continually exercised upon the lower classes; but he seemed to regret his words as soon as spoken; and,—as if he knew that, at some time, a fearful and deadly contest must arise between himself and the oppressors of his class, and strove anxiously, and with a feeling of awe, to delay it as long as possible,—he avoided all matter of quarrel with the nobility of Ghent, or with the officers of the Duke of Burgundy. He seemed desirous of closing his eyes to subjects of offence; and, when he heard of a brawl in any neighbouring part of the town, or when the other young citizens called upon him to take a lead in their frequent tumults, he would either quit the place for the time, or shut himself sternly in his own dwelling, in order to avoid any participation in the dangerous occurrences that were taking place.

On one of these occasions, when the city of Ghent, though not in open revolt, was keeping up an angry discussion with the high officers of the duke, Albert Maurice, then in his twenty-fourth year, obtained his uncle's consent to travel into Italy, for the purpose of superintending some transactions which their house was carrying on with the merchant lords of Venice. In that sweet climate, the nurse of arts and too often of crimes, he acquired an elegance of taste, and a grace of manner, unknown to the burghers of his native place. He came home, skilled in many arts with which they were unacquainted; and, had his spirit been less powerful, his talents less commanding, it is not improbable that his fellow citizens might have contemned or laughed at acquirements which they had not learned to appreciate, and might have scorned the travelled coxcomb who brought home strange modes and fashions to his native land. But Albert Maurice made a show of none; and it was only upon long solicitation, or on some moment of joyous festivity, that he would sing the sweet songs of a softer people, and accompany himself with instruments unknown in his own country.

His personal beauty, and the fascinating grace of his manners, made him seem a creature of a different race, and his superiority

in every quality, both of mind and body, to those around him, might have been a blessing, had he not felt it himself; but he did feel it, and of course was discontented,—and who can doubt that anything which makes man discontented with his state, without giving him the certainty of a better, is a curse? All eyes turned upon him with satisfaction; and many a soft, kind heart would willingly have given itself to him; but his thoughts were of another kind, and he could see none to love amongst the many by whom he was admired. The fair girls of Ghent,—and many a fair girl was then, and is now, within its walls—thought him cold and proud, and blamed him for what was his misfortune, not his fault. His heart was one on which love might have taken as firm a hold as on that of any man that ever burned or died for woman since the world began: but he sought for his equal,—I do not mean in rank, for that he never heeded,—but in mind; and he found none such within the number of all he knew.

Shut out by circumstance from the higher ranks of society, the finer feelings, the better aspirations of his soul, were matter for a thousand disgusts; and though a native sense of what is noble in itself, and just to others, made him laboriously conceal the very superiority which he felt, as well as its consequences, yet the conversation, the manners, the thoughts, of those around him—even those with whom he was most intimately allied—were constant sources of hidden pain and annoyance. He lived amongst the people of Ghent, and he strove to live with them; and so far did he succeed, that though his talents and his occasional reserve made his townsfolk look upon him with no small reverence, the urbanity of his manners, when brought into casual contact with the other citizens, gained him a far greater degree of popularity than any general familiarity could have won.

The union of pride and ambition—and he had both qualities in his bosom—usually leads the man, whose mind is so constituted, to seek to rise into the class above him: but both his pride and his ambition were too potent for that. He was proud of the very difference between his station and himself—he had a deep and settled love, too, of his country, and even of his class and while his ambition was of a quality which would have snatched at empire, had there been a hope of success, the hatred and contempt in which he held the nobles were far too great for

him to covet aught but the power to trample them down amongst those ranks whom they now oppressed.

Such had some of the characters, whom we have attempted to depict at an earlier period of life, become, under the passing of twenty years. Time, in short, had done his wonted work on all—had expanded the bud and the blossom into the green leaf and the flower, and had changed the flower and the shoot into the ready fruit and the ripened ear. But there are others yet to be spoken of, and to them we will now return.

CHAPTER VII.

The withering power of Time—which, in brief space, can make such havoc on man, and all man's works, that friend shall scarce know friend, and grass shall have swallowed up the highways—is impotent against the ever renewing vigour of Nature; and in the forest of Hannut, the twenty years which had passed, seemed scarcely to show the difference of a day. Green oaks were withered, it is true; the lightning had scathed the pine and rent the beech; the woodman's axe had been busy here and there; but, in constant succession, the children of the wood had grown up to take the place of those which had fallen; and the most discerning eye could scarce have traced a single change in all the forest scene around.

Days seemed to have altered, however, and manners to have changed in the forest of Hannut; for, instead of very equivocal looking soldiers, and travellers who wandered on with fear and trembling, there was now to be seen, near the very same cascade by the side of which we opened this book, a gay, light party, whose thoughts appeared all of joy, and to whom terror seemed perfectly a stranger. That party consisted of three principal personages, with their attendants; and, mounted on splendid horses, whose high spirit, though bowed to the most complete obedience to man's will, was in no degree diminished, they rode gaily across the bridge, and paused by the side of the stream.

The first whom we shall notice—a powerful young cavalier, who might be in the thirtieth year of his age, who might be less,

sun-burnt, but naturally fair, strong in all his limbs, but easy and graceful in his movements—sprang to the ground as they approached the waterfall; and laying his hand on the gilded bridle of a white jennet, that cantered on by his side, he assisted the person who rode it to dismount.

She was a fair, beautiful girl, of about eighteen or nineteen years of age, round whose broad white forehead fell clusters of glossy light brown hair; her eyebrows and her eyelashes, however, were dark; and through the long deep fringe of the latter looked forth a pair of blue and laughing eyes—which beamed with the same merry happiness that curled the arch of her sweet lips.

Two of the attendants who followed, hurried forward to hold the bridle and the stirrup of the third person of the party, who dismounted more slowly, as became the gravity of his years. Time, indeed, had not broken, and had hardly bent him; but evidences of the iron-handed conqueror's progress were to be traced in the snowy hair and beard, which had once been of the deepest black; and in the long furrows strongly marked across the once smooth brow. In other respects, the Lord of Hannut was but little changed. The same dark, grave cast of countenance remained; the same spare, but vigorous form; though, indeed, without appearing to stoop, his height seemed somewhat diminished since last we brought him before the reader's eyes. A gleam of affectionate pleasure lighted up his countenance, as he marked the graceful gallantry with which his young companion aided the fair girl who accompanied them to dismount; and when, after having rendered his service to the lady, the cavalier turned to offer him his arm also, with a sort of half apology for not having done so before, he replied, smiling,—"Thou art better employed, dear boy; think'st thou I have so far forgotten my chivalry as to grudge the attention thou bestow'st upon a lady? Here, spread out here," he continued, turning to the attendants and pointing to the green short turf which carpeted the bank of the stream just below the waterfall; "we could not find a better place for our meal than this."

By the birds which they carried on their wrists, it was evident that the whole party had been flying their hawks, the favourite amusement, at that time, of the higher classes throughout Flanders. They now, however, seated themselves to a sort of

sylvan dinner, which was spread upon the turf by the attendants, who—with that mixture of familiarity and respect which were perfectly compatible with each other, and usual in those days, and in such sports—sat down with the persons of higher rank, at once to partake of their fare, and assist them at their meal.

The conversation was gay and lively, especially between the two younger persons whom we have noticed. They were evidently in habits of intimacy; and on the cavalier's part there appeared that tender but cheerful attention to his fair companion, which argued feelings of a somewhat warmer nature than kindred affection, yet without any of that apprehension which love—if the return be doubtful—is sure to display. Her manner was of a different kind; it was not less affectionate—it was not less gentle—but it was of that light and playful character, under which very deep and powerful attachment sometimes endeavours to conceal itself—the timidity which hides itself in boldness—the consciousness of feeling deeply, which sometimes leads to the assumption of feeling little. It was understood, however, and appreciated by her lover, who, possibly, had taken some more serious moment, when the light and active guardian of the casket slept, to pry into the secret of the heart within.

Love, however, it would appear, is insatiable of assurances; and, probably, it was on some fresh demand for new, or greater acknowledgment, that the lady replied to a half-whispered speech,—"Certainly, dear Hugh! Can you doubt it? I will try, with all my mind, to love you; for, as we are to be married, whether we love each other or not, it is but good policy to strive to do so, if it be possible." And as she spoke, she fixed her eyes upon her companion's face, with a look of malicious inquiry, as if to see what effect the lukewarmness of her speech would produce upon a heart she knew to be sufficiently susceptible.

He only laughed, however, and replied,—"Sing me a song, then, dear Alice, to cheer these green woods, and make me think you love me better than you do."

"Not I, indeed," replied the young lady. "In the first place, I would not cheat you for the world; and in the next place, neither song nor *pastourelle*, nor *sirvente*, nor *virelai*, will I ever sing, till I am asked in song myself. Sing, sing, Hugh! You have been at the bright court of France, and are, I know, a

master of the *gaie science.* Sing the light lay you sang yester evening; or some other, if you know one. It matters not much which."

"Be it so, if you will sing afterwards," replied the young cavalier; and without farther question, than an inquiring glance towards the Lord of Hannut, he sang, in a full, rich, melodious voice, one of the common songs of the day, which was not altogether inapplicable to her speech. The words, though in a different language, were somewhat to the following effect:—

SONG.

Sing in the days of the spring-time, beloved;
In those days of sweetness, oh, sing to me!
When all things by one glad spirit are moved,
From the sky-lark to the bee.

Sing in the days, too, of summer-time, dearest;
In those days of fire, oh, sing to me, then!
When suns are the brightest, and skies are clearest,
Sing, sing in the woods again.

Sing to me still in the autumn's deep glory;
In the golden fall-time, oh, be not mute!
Some sweet, wand'ring ditty from ancient story,
That well with the time may suit.

Sing to me still in the dark hours of sadness,
When winter across the sky is driven;
But sing not the wild tones of mirth and gladness,
Then sing of peace and heaven.

"A pretty song enough, for a man to sing," observed the young lady, as her lover concluded; "but, as I do not choose to be dictated to by anybody, I shall even sing you such a song as suits me myself, whether in season or out of season. What say you, dearest uncle?" she added, turning to the Lord of Hannut; and laying the fair rounded fingers of her soft hand upon his, "What shall I sing him?" And as she spoke, she raised her eyes towards the sky, as if trying to remember some particular lay from amongst the many that she knew; but scarcely had she done so, when an involuntary cry burst from her lips,—"Good Heaven!" she exclaimed, "there are armed men looking at us from the top of the bank—There, there!"

Every one started up, and turned their eyes in the direction

which hers had taken. There was, indeed, a rustle heard amongst the trees; and a stone or two, detached from above, rolled down the crag, and plunged into the stream at its foot. But no one was to be seen; and, after gazing for a moment in silence, the lover beckoned one of his attendants to follow, and bounding up the most difficult part of the cliff, notwithstanding the fair girl's entreaty to forbear, he plunged into the brushwood, in pursuit of the person who had disturbed their tranquillity.

"You are dreaming, my fair Alice," said the Lord of Hannut; "and have sent poor Hugh de Mortmar on a foolish errand."

"Nay, indeed, uncle," replied Alice, "I dreamed not at all. I am not one to dream in such a sort. For Heaven's sake! bid one ride to bring us assistance, and send some of the men up to aid poor Hugh; for, as sure as I live, I saw two or three faces with steel caps above, looking through the branches of the trees. Hark! do you not hear voices? Climb up, sirs, if you be men, and aid your young lord!"

The attendants looked to the Baron; and on his part, the Lord of Hannut only smiled with an air of incredulity; when, much, indeed, to the surprise of Alice, her lover appeared above the moment after; and, springing easily down the rock, declared that all was clear beyond.

She gazed on him for a moment in serious silence, and then merely replied,—"It is very strange!" Hugh de Mortmar cast himself down again by her side, and once more pressed her to sing; but it was in vain. Alice was agitated and alarmed; and finding it impossible to shake off her terror, she besought her uncle to break up the party and return to the castle, notwithstanding assurances from all that she must have been deceived by the waving of some of the boughs, or the misty spray of the cataract.

Finding, at length, that to reason with her was fruitless, her uncle agreed to return; and the horses being led forward, the whole party remounted, and, with their hawks once more upon their hands, made the best of their way back towards the castle of Hannut. For the first two or three miles, Alice continued anxiously to watch every opening of the trees on either side of the road; remaining in such a state of alarm, that her falcon's wings were continually flapping, from the agitated haste with which she turned to gaze on every object that they passed on the road. It was only when they came within sight of

the vassal town, and the castle on its high rock, about half a mile beyond, that she seemed to consider herself in safety; and the long, deep breath she drew, as they passed through the barbacan, announced what a load was taken off her mind when she found herself within the walls of her uncle's castle.

"You have dwelt so long in cities, dear Alice," said the Lord of Hannut, laughing, "that the forest is a strange world to you; and your imagination peoples it with creatures of its own. I shall write to your father, my good Lord of Imbercourt, to say, that he must leave you many a month with me yet, till we have cured you of seeing these wild men of the woods."

"Nay, uncle," replied the young lady, who had by this time recovered her playful spirits, and looked up in his face as she spoke, with a smile of arch meaning; "if I were to be terrified with imaginary things, I can tell you I should not have come at all; for my maids have got many a goodly story of the castle of Hannut and its forest—ay, and of its lord to boot; and, on the morning after our arrival, I found that they had all burnt shoes and twisted necks, with sitting the whole of the night before, with their feet in the fire and their heads turned over their shoulders."

The Lord of Hannut heard her with a melancholy smile. "And hadst thou no fear thyself, my fair Alice?" he demanded; "didst thy imagination never fill the dark end of the chamber with sprites and hobgoblins?"

"Nay, nay, in truth, not I!" replied the young lady; "such things have no terrors for me; but, when I saw three armed men looking down upon us in the forest, and thought that there might be thirty more behind, there was some cause for terror."

The Lord of Hannut and Hugh de Mortmar—in whom the reader has, doubtless, by this time discovered that Hugh of Gueldres, who, twenty years before, was found sleeping by the cascade—looked at each other with a meaning smile, but replied nothing; and indeed the conversation was here brought to a conclusion by a variety of unwonted sounds which now suddenly rose up from the forest below. Seldom was it, in truth, that those wild woods rang with the clang of charging horse, and echoed to the blast of the trumpets; but such was the case in the present instance: and, as the sounds came borne upon the wind through the open windows, the brow of the Lord of Hannut

darkened, and his eye flashed, while the cheek of the younger cavalier flushed as if with anger.

"By the Lord! our fair Alice is right, it would seem!" cried Hugh de Mortmar; "there are more men in the wood than we thought for. What, ho! warder!" he exclaimed, leaning from the narrow window and shouting to some one stationed in the gallery of a tall slender tower, which, more like some Moorish minaret than anything else, rose, towering above all the others on the opposite side of the court-yard. "What, ho! warder! what seest thou down in the woods below?—By the Lord! there is another blast," he added, as the trumpets again echoed through the woods.

The next moment the loud voice of the warder was heard in reply,—"I see a plump of spears under the arms of Burgundy, running down a handful of the green riders,—but they have not caught them yet. They come closer—they come closer," he added; "but the riders make face—they turn again, and spur on—the men-at-arms are thrown out; but I can see no more, my lord; they have all got beneath the haggard hill."

"Sound the ban-cloche, ho!" exclaimed the young cavalier: "arm, and saddle! arm, and saddle, below there!" he continued, shouting to some of the groups who were assembled in the court-yard. "I would fain see who it is," he added, turning to the Lord of Hannut, "who dares to hunt down any men in these woods, your free domain, without your good leave, my lord."

"Beware, Hugh, beware!" said the Lord of Hannut, holding up his hand with a monitory gesture.

"I will, I will, indeed, my lord," he replied; "I will be most cautious." So saying, he sprang down the steps into the court-yard, and, while the great bell or ban-cloche rang out its warning peal over hill and dale, he gave rapid orders for arming a small body of men; and was springing on his own horse to lead them down to the valley below, when the warder called from above, announcing that the party of Burgundians he had before seen, together with a considerable troop of strangers, were winding up the steep road that led directly to the castle.

Hugh de Mortmar paused; and the instant after, a trumpet was blown at the barbacan, by a squire sent forward by the party to give notice of the approach of the noble Lord of Imbercourt to the dwelling of his good brother-in-law of Hannut.

The gates of the castle were immediately thrown open; the armed retainers of its lord were drawn up to receive his honoured guest; and Alice ran down to meet her father, whose unexpected coming seemed a gratifying event to all. Hugh de Mortmar, however, lingered behind, conversing for a few moments in a low and hurried tone with the Lord of Hannut; and the only words which were heard,—"It is strange that he should have done so in your domains, my lord—a man so careful in his conduct as he is in general—They surely would never dare to attack *him*,"—seemed to show that the two gentlemen spoke of the events which had just taken place in the forest.

While thus conversing, they overtook Alice of Imbercourt, whose impatience had hurried her forward; and then dropping the subject, they advanced with her even beyond the grate of the barbacan, and stood on the edge of the hill, looking down upon the large party that approached, as it wound slowly up the steep ascent which led to the castle.

The cavalcade soon came near; and it became evident, as it did so, that it comprised two distinct bodies: the one being but partially armed, and riding under the banner of the Lord of Imbercourt; the other being clothed in steel from head to heel, and bearing conspicuous the cognizance of the house of Burgundy. The first band, however, was the most numerous, and might consist, perhaps, of a hundred men-at-arms, independent of a number of grooms, horse-boys, and varlets, as they were called, leading several spare horses, some perfectly unburdened, and some loaded with large quantities of armour tied together confusedly with ropes and chains, and so disposed as to be little burdensome to the horse. The other party seemed to have no baggage of any kind; and the arms of all sorts which they employed, they bore about their own persons.

Thus accoutred, both bodies wound on up the slope, glancing in and out of the scattered wood, which, tinted with all the thousand shades of the declining sun, clothed the ascent, and cast long marking shadows across the winding road of yellow sand. Now, the horsemen passing through the depths of the wood could scarcely be distinguished from the trees amidst which they advanced; now, emerging from the overhanging boughs, they stood out clear upon the evening sky, as their path skirted along the edge of the cliff. At first all appeared indistinct—one confused mass of horses and riders; but, soon coming nearer,

the form of each individual horseman became defined; and gradually their features, as they wore their helmets up, could be distinguished by those who stood and watched their approach.

At the head of the first party rode a tall, handsome, middle-aged man, with a countenance which was grave, without being austere. When within a few yards of the top of the hill, he threw his horse's rein to a squire, and, springing lightly to the ground, advanced with a quick step towards the little group of persons assembled to meet him. Yielding first to natural affection, he cast his arms round his daughter, Alice of Imbercourt, and pressed her to his bosom. He then saluted frankly and kindly the Lord of Hannut and Hugh de Mortmar; and, as he held their hands in each of his, he said, in a low and hurried tone intended to meet their ear, and their ear alone, before the rest of the party came up,—"I beseech you, my good brother, and you, my dear Hugh—whom one day I shall call my son—whatever you may hear presently, bridle your anger. Your rights have been somewhat violated by the leader of that band behind; but I have prevailed upon him to desist: and both because he is a high officer of our sovereign lord the duke, and because these times are too threatening from abroad to admit of feuds between subjects at home, I entreat you to govern your indignation as much as may be."

The followers of Imbercourt had halted as soon as they reached the level ground or terrace in face of the barbacan; and the leader of the second band, having by this time gained the brow of the hill, now rode quickly up to the party at the gate. He was a tall, gaunt, bony man, of about forty, with keen eagle's features, and a look of that bold assurance which proceeds more from animal courage, and a mind continually upon its guard, than from conscious rectitude of action or design. He was armed at all points except the head, which was covered alone by its short curly grizzled hair, while his basinet hung beside his axe at the saddle-bow. Such was the appearance now borne by Maillotin du Bac, the famous Prévôt Maréchal of Burgundy, who, having been himself one of the most notorious plunderers of the time, had been appointed by Charles of Burgundy to root out the bands by which the country was infested —probably on the faith of the old adage, which recommends us to set a thief to catch a thief.

"You are my Lord of Hannut, fair sir, I presume?" said the

Prévôt, dismounting, and speaking in a coarse, sharp, jarring tone of voice only fit for a hangman.

The Lord of Hannut answered by a stately bow, and the other proceeded: "My good Lord of Imbercourt, here, whom I reverence and respect, as in duty bound—he being as stout a soldier as he is a worthy counsellor—has but now prayed, or rather commanded,—for he having taken the responsibility upon himself, I have yielded of course to his injunctions,—has commanded me to desist from pursuing the brigands and plunderers who, for many years past, have haunted this forest of Hannut."

"Sir," replied the Lord of Hannut, "I, living within the precincts of the wood itself, am, it appears, sadly ignorant of what goes on beneath its shade; for during nearly twenty years I have heard of no outrage whatsoever committed within the bounds of my domain. Had I done so—had any tale of robbery or pillage met my ears—I, as supreme lord, holding a right of exercising justice both high and low, would not have failed to clear the territory within my jurisdiction of such gentry as you mention; nor shall I certainly suffer any one else to interfere with my rights, within my own lands."

"My lord! my lord!" replied the Prévôt; "I will easily furnish you with proof that your forest is tenanted as I say. Did we not, within this half hour, encounter a whole party of as undoubted brigands as ever lived?"

"That you attacked some persons in the forest, Sir Prévôt, was well enough seen from the belfry of the castle," rejoined Hugh de Mortmar, with a frowning brow; "but whether they were not as honest or honester persons than yourself, remains to be proved, and shall be inquired into most strictly. At all events, sir, you have infringed upon the rights of my uncle, which must be inquired into also.—Well, well, my dear lord," he added, noticing a sign by which the Lord of Hannut required him to be silent; "well, well, I say no more, than that these thief-catchers grow too insolent."

The brow of Maillotin du Bac bent, his eyebrows almost met, and his left hand played ominously with the hilt of his dagger, as he muttered,—"Thief-catchers!" But farther discussion was cut short by the Lord of Hannut, who exclaimed,—"Peace, Hugh! peace! we must not show scanty hospitality to any one. Sir Maillotin du Bac, we will speak farther with you hereafter, on the subjects that you mention; and if you can

prove to us that any outrage of any kind has been committed within the limits of my domain, both my nephew and myself will do our best to punish the offenders. But neither duke nor king shall exercise, within my lordship, the rights which belong alone to me."

"Outrage, sir!" rejoined the Prévôt; "did not the men who burnt the house of the Lord of Harghen take refuge in your forests within this month?"

"Whether they did or not, I cannot say," replied the Lord of Hannut; "but their burning the house of that audacious villain, the oppressor of the poor, the plunderer of the widow and the orphan, was no very evil deed in my eyes. However, let us not bandy words here at the gate; we will speak farther this evening."

The whole party now passed through the barbacan, and the Lord of Hannut gave special order to his seneschal to attend to the comfort of the soldiers, while he himself led his brother-in-law, the Lord of Imbercourt, and a few of that nobleman's most distinguished attendants, towards the great hall of the castle.

Maillotin du Bac followed boldly, as one of the chief guests; and finding that no great courtesy was shown him in marshalling the way, he exclaimed, in a loud and intrusive voice,—"My lord! my lord! before we leave our men, I must crave that you would yield me the use of a dungeon."

"For your own abode, sir?" demanded Hugh de Mortmar, with not the most gracious smile in the world.

"No, no," replied the Prévôt, "but for yon prisoner there;" and he pointed to a part of the court-yard, where two of his followers were aiding a young man of a powerful frame and striking appearance to dismount from his horse, which was rendered difficult by his arms being tightly pinioned behind.

"That can be no thief, surely," said Hugh de Mortmar; "I never saw a nobler countenance. By his dress, too, he seems a burgher of the first order."

"The gown does not make the monk," replied Maillotin du Bac, with a grim smile. "If he be no thief, he may be somewhat worse. However, he was not taken on these territories, and therefore, my good lord, his capture can be no offence to you. For courtesy's sake, and for the prince's service, I claim the use of a dungeon for this night. He is a state prisoner, and must be guarded carefully."

"Be it so, Sir Prévôt," answered the Lord of Hannut; "thank God, all my dungeons are clear at present; and far be it from me to oppose the due exercise of your office, in the duke's service."

"Said like a worthy lord, as I always held you," replied the Prévôt. "Where shall we bestow him?"

"Roger de Lorens," said the Lord of Hannut, turning to his seneschal, "show this worthy gentleman, the Prévôt of our lord the duke, the different prison-rooms beneath the square tower; let him choose which he will, as most secure; and when he has made his choice, give him up the key thereof. Be the prisoner under your own charge, Sir Maillotin du Bac," he added; "yet, for the honour of my dwelling I trust that you will let his treatment be as gentle as may be. Let him have wine and other refreshments to keep his spirits up, I pray you."

"Black bread and foul water would be good enough for him," replied Maillotin du Bac; "but at your request, my lord, he shall have better fare. Sir Seneschal, I follow you; lead the way. Ho! Martin du Garch, bring along the prisoner."

Thus saying, the Prévôt of the Duke of Burgundy,—who, though a knight and a man of good family, had once, as we have before noticed, been a notorious adventurer, and had now become the great persecutor of his former comrades,—followed the seneschal of Hannut across the court-yard, towards the passage which led to the dungeons. In the meanwhile, the Lord of Hannut, Hugh de Mortmar, the Lord of Imbercourt, and his daughter Alice, advanced to the great hall, where preparations were already in course for serving the evening meal.

CHAPTER VIII.

While the Prévôt of Burgundy had remained within ear-shot, Imbercourt had maintained a profound silence, or, speaking in a low familiar tone to his daughter, had appeared perfectly inattentive to what was going on beside him. No sooner, however, had they passed on through the great hall, and up a flight of steps, into a large sort of withdrawing room, in which it was the

custom of the guests in those days to wash their hands before dinner, than he closed the door, and earnestly thanked the two noble gentlemen by whom he was accompanied for their forbearance on the present occasion. "I have much, much to tell you, my noble brother-in-law," he said; "and much on which to ask your advice. Much have I also to tell you, Hugh," he added, laying his hand on the arm of the younger of the two noblemen; "but I must do it in as few words as possible, before we are joined by that unworthy man, whom we must not offend, though he be part spy, part hangman, part cut-throat. In the first place, in your solitude here, you scarcely know the state either of the duchy of Burgundy, or of the county of Flanders; both of which are unhappily in so dangerous a situation, that it will need infinite moderation, prudence, and skill, on the part of all true lovers of their country, to keep us from events too fearful to contemplate. Throughout the whole of Duke Charles's dominions, the nobles are turbulent and discontented; the citizens rebellious and insolent; and, to crown all, the duke himself, never very temperate in his conduct, seems, since the defeat of Granson, to have given unbridled rein to his fury, and to have cast all common prudence away as a burdensome incumbrance."

"We have heard, indeed," said the Lord of Hannut, "of his having hanged a garrison of four hundred Swiss, whom he found in a town in Lorraine,—a most barbarous and inhuman act, which, if he commit many such, will make all good men abandon him."

"Too true, indeed," replied Imbercourt; "but I fear this is but a prelude to greater outrages."

"Ay, and to greater misfortunes," interrupted the Lord of Hannut. "If there be any truth in the starry influences, he has met with some deep misfortune already, and will meet with greater still ere long.—When heard you from the duke?" he added, seeing a doubtful smile curl the lip of his brother-in-law, as he referred to an art in which Imbercourt placed less faith than most of his contemporaries.

"Our last news is more than a fortnight old," answered Imbercourt; "the duke was then marching rapidly towards the mountains. But it was not of his intemperance towards the Swiss I was about to speak, though his conduct to them has been cruel enough. Still they were enemies; but he seems resolved

to drive the men of Ghent into revolt also; and he has commanded his prévôt to arrest any one, whether merchant, mechanic, or noble, who attempts to pass the frontier from Ghent into France. The prisoner, whom you saw but now, is the first-fruit of this precious order. That meddling fool, Du Bac, who, like the tiger, loves blood for blood's sake, takes care to fulfil every intemperate order of the duke to the very uttermost, especially against the Gandois, towards whom he and some others of his fellows have a most deadly hatred. I can hear of no precise offence which the prisoner has committed, though his captor has shown me some letters found upon him, which he would fain construe into treason; and if they urge the matter farther against him, they will drive the men of Ghent mad outright.—Why, one half of their trade is with France!"

"How is it then, my lord," demanded Hugh, "that you do not interfere to set him at liberty?"

"I dare not for my head," replied Imbercourt. "Besides, I am not here in the capacity of counsellor: I am now, by the duke's order, marching to join him with the small force that you see,—all, indeed, that I have been able to raise. But to the object of my coming! Hugh, the duke needs men, and calls angrily on all his vassals to take the field. Often and earnestly have I entreated for clemency towards your father; and my entreaties have been in vain. One good stroke in the field, however, done by your hand, were worth more than all the eloquence that the tongue of man could ever boast. Gather together what forces you can, and follow me to the camp, under the name you have at present assumed. I will take care that you shall have the opportunity of distinguishing yourself: and, from your conduct both in Spain and Italy, I fear not but ——"

"It is in vain, my lord, it is in vain," replied Hugh de Mortmar. "Never will I draw my sword for a man who holds my father a close prisoner: surely it is enough not to draw my sword against him; and it has only been for the hope that this fair hand——," and as he spoke he raised that of Alice, who had been listening, with her deep blue eyes full of anxious attention—"and it has only been for the hope that this fair hand would form a bond, which, uniting the fate of Imbercourt and Gueldres together, would render them too strong for tyranny to resist, that I have refrained, during the last year,

from attempting to open the gates of my father's prison by force, while the oppressor is embarrassed with wars and misfortunes that his own grasping and cruel disposition has brought upon his head."

"I cannot blame your feelings, Hugh," replied the Lord of Imbercourt, "nor will I hurt you by pointing out the somewhat serious causes of offence which have induced the duke to treat your father with so great severity; but do you, at the same time, moderate your angry terms, and remember that Charles of Burgundy is my sovereign lord, my benefactor, and my friend. —I think I need say no more."

He spoke with grave and impressive earnestness, and seemed about to proceed to some other part of the subject, when the heavy clanging step of Maillotin du Bac, as he walked nonchalantly up the stairs, from the great hall, into the withdrawing room, warned the Lord of Imbercourt that a suspicious ear was nigh, and he merely added, "We will speak more to-night."

The Prévôt entered the room with a look of great satisfaction, slipping at the same time the handle of an enormous key over the thong of his belt, which he again buckled over his shoulder; so that the key, dropping down till it struck against his sword, hung by the side of the more chivalrous weapon, offering no bad type of the character of the wearer.

"Admirable dungeons these, my good Lord of Hannut," he reiterated as he entered,—"Admirable dungeons, admirable dungeons indeed!—Your own construction, I doubt not, and a good construction it is. I defy the nimblest cut-purse in the empire to make his way thence, while this key hangs at my side. The window, indeed, the window is a little too wide; what the devil the rogues want windows for at all, I don't understand,—but it is just a thought too wide. I have known a fat young rogue so starve himself down in a week's time, that he would get through a hole that would not have passed his thigh when first he was taken. No fear of yon fellow below, however; it would require a precious hole to pass his chest and shoulders."

"Pray, what is the poor youth's offence?" demanded the Lord of Hannut; but as the other was about to reply, the pages and varlets—as the inferior servants were called in that day,—brought in basins, ewers, and napkins, for the guests to wash, while the trumpets sounded loud without; and, in a few moments afterwards, the whole party were seated at their evening meal.

As must always be the case in such meetings,—when the ingredients of the assembly are discrepant in themselves, notwithstanding the fortuitous circumstances which may for the time have brought them together—the conversation was broken and interrupted. Sometimes the loud swell of many voices made, for a minute or two, an unspeakable din. Sometimes one or two protracted the conversation in a lower tone, after the others had ceased; but still, every subject that was started, dropped after a few minutes' discussion, and the parties betook themselves again to demolishing the huge piles of meat which, according to the custom of those times, were set before them. Wine was in plenty, but all drank sparingly, except the Prévôt, and one or two of the officers who followed the Lord of Imbercourt. For his part, Maillotin du Bac seemed determined that, as far as the quality of his favours went, no jealousy should exist between the trencher and the pottle-pot. His food swam down his throat in Burgundy, and the consequences were such as are usual with men of strong constitutions and well-seasoned brains. He lost not in the least degree the use of his senses; but his tongue, on which he was never wont to impose any very strict restraint, obtained an additional degree of liberty after the fifth or sixth cup he had quaffed; and, perceiving the Lord of Hannut speaking for a few moments in a low tone to his brother-in-law, he concluded at once that their conversation must refer to his prisoner; and, resuming the subject without farther ceremony, he replied to the question his entertainer had put to him before dinner—so abruptly, indeed, that for the moment no one understood what he meant.

"Offence, indeed!" exclaimed Maillotin du Bac—"offence enough, I trow; why now, I'll tell you how it was. We had just come out of Namur, where we had supped,—not quite so well as we have done here, it's true; no matter for that, we had wine enough—and we were quartering ourselves in a little village down below, when one of my fellows, as stout a hand as ever was born, got saying something civil to the wife of a draper, just at the door of her shop. What more I don't know, but the foolish cullion took it into her head to cry out; when up comes my young gallant there in the dungeon, and at one blow fells my fellow, Stephen, to the ground with a broken jaw.—What the devil business had he with it? If he had been an old lover of hers, well enough; but he confesses

that he never saw her before till that moment, and must come up and meddle, because she chose to squeal like a caught hare."

Hugh de Mortmar turned his eyes upon the Lord of Imbercourt, who bit his lip, and observed gravely,—"Were this all the young man's offence, Sir Prévôt, it would behove us to consider the matter better before we give way to your hankering for dungeons and cords."

"Ha, ha! my lord," replied the Prévôt, with a grin, "not so great a fool as that either! Had I not thought to make more of the good youth, I would have split his skull where he stood, with my-axe; and his punishment taking place in *chaudemelée*, as the laws of St. Louis have it, we should have heard nothing more of the matter: but I knew the gallant well by sight,—one who affects popularity amongst the turbulent folk of Ghent; and having orders to arrest all who attempted to cross the frontier into France, I laid hold of him forthwith, examined his papers, and found sufficient, with a little good management, to give him a cool dangle by the neck in the fresh air of some fine September morning. But what need I say more? You yourself have seen the letters."

"Meddling fool!" muttered Imbercourt to himself; "he will contrive to drive the duke's subjects into revolt at home, while he is assailed by enemies abroad." This speech, however, passed no farther than the ears of the two persons next to him. And the conversation soon turned to the bands of freebooters which, the Prévôt stoutly asserted, harboured in the forest of Hannut.

A few words passed, in an under tone, between Hugh de Mortmar and the Lord of Hannut; and at length the old noble proceeded to discuss with the Prévôt of the Duke of Burgundy the infraction of his rights which had been committed by that officer in the morning. The Prévôt, however, sturdily maintained his ground, declaring that he himself, and all his band, consisting of about forty persons, had encountered and pursued a considerable body of men, whose appearance and demeanour left not the slightest doubt in regard to their general trade and occupation. Going farther still, he appealed to the Lord of Imbercourt himself, who had come up while the freebooters were still in sight, and who actually did confirm his account in every particular.

"Well, sir," replied the Lord of Hannut, "since such is the case, far be it from me to impede the execution of justice.

The maintenance of the law within my own territories I have always hitherto attended to myself—and that so strictly, that for twenty years I have heard of no outrage within the limits of my own domain——"

"Why, as to that, my lord," interrupted the Prévôt, grinning, "we do hear that you have an especial police of your own,—a sort of airy archers of the guard, who keep better watch and ward than mortal eyes can do. Nevertheless I must not neglect my duty, while I am in the body; and in doing it, I fear neither man nor spirit."

"I know not, to what you are pleased to allude, sir," replied the Lord of Hannut, frowning: "nevertheless I may find many means to punish those who are insolent. However, as you say that you have seen evil-disposed persons in the forest, and my Lord of Imbercourt here confirms your statement, I will grant you permission for one day to scour the whole of my domain from side to side; and if you should find any one strong enough to make head against you, my own vassals shall be summoned to give you aid. After that day, however, you must withdraw your troop and retire, nor ever again presume to set foot within my bounds without my permission."

"One day, my lord," replied the Prévôt, "will be hardly——"

"I shall grant no more, sir," said the Lord of Hannut, rising from the table, in which example he was followed by several of his guests; "I shall grant no more, sir; and the concession which I make, proceeds solely from a feeling of respect for my good lord the Duke of Burgundy. Though I rise," he added, addressing all the party from a general feeling of courtesy, "though I rise, do not hold it, gentlemen, as a signal to break off your revelry. Spare not the flagon, I beseech you; and here are comfits and spices to give zest to your wine."

Thus saying, he retired from the hall; and, leading the way to the battlements, entered into a long and, to them, interesting conversation with Imbercourt and Hugh de Mortmar,—as we shall continue to call the son of the imprisoned Duke of Gueldres.

With all his eloquence, however, Imbercourt failed to persuade the young cavalier to join the armies of the Duke of Burgundy. To every argument he replied, that men fought for their friends, not their enemies; and such he should ever hold Charles of Burgundy to be, till Adolphus of Gueldres was set at liberty.

All that could be obtained from him was a promise not to attempt his father's liberation by arms, till one more effort had been made to persuade Charles the Bold to grant his freedom upon other terms.

"Consider well, Hugh, the peculiar situation in which you stand," said the Lord of Imbercourt; "the secret of your birth rests with myself and my good brother here alone; but did the duke know that the son of Adolphus of Gueldres is still living, the imprisonment of your father would, in all probability, become more severe, and your own personal safety might be very doubtful. An ineffectual attempt to liberate him, must instantly divulge all; nor could I,—though I have promised you my Alice, in case we can obtain by peaceful means that which we so much desire,—nor could I, as a faithful servant of the house of Burgundy, give you my daughter's hand, if you were once actually in arms against the lord I serve."

"It is a hard alternative," said Hugh de Mortmar—"it is a hard alternative;" and as he spoke he bent down his eyes, and pondered for several minutes on the difficult situation in which he was placed.

His heart, however, was full of the buoyant and rejoicing spirit of youth; and the cares that ploughed it one minute, only caused it to bring forth a harvest of fresh hopes the next. Hard as was his fate in some respects, when he compared it with that of the young man who now tenanted one of the dungeons of that very castle,—a comparison to which his mind was naturally called,—he did not, indeed, feel gratification, as some would argue, at the evils of his fellow-creature's lot; but he felt that there was much to be grateful for in his own. Hope, and liberty, and love, were all before him; and his expectations rose high, as he thought how much worse his fate might have been. Such ideas led him to think over, and to pity, the situation of the unhappy prisoner; and quitting the subject of his own affairs, he inquired of the Lord of Imbercourt, whether he, as a counsellor of the duke, could not take upon himself to set the unfortunate burgher at liberty.

"I would well-nigh give my right hand to do so," replied Imbercourt, "not alone for the sake of simple justice to an individual, but for the sake of the peace and tranquillity of the whole state; but I must not do it, my young friend. I have seen the letters which this Du Bac found upon his person: they

consist of little more than the murmurs and complaints of discontented citizens, such as are to be met with in all countries and in all times; and which, at any other period would attract no attention whatever. At present, however, with faction and turbulence spreading over the whole land; with courtiers, who find it their interest to urge the duke on to acts of insane violence; and with a prince, whose temper and power are equally uncontrollable; those papers *may* cost the young man's life, *will* probably set the city of Ghent into open revolt, and *might* light a flame in the land which it would require oceans of blood to extinguish. Nevertheless I dare not interfere."

Hugh de Mortmar made no reply, but mused for a few moments in silence; and then, with a gay, light laugh, and a jest about some other matter, he left his two elder companions, and proceeded to seek his fair Alice through all the long, rambling chambers, and retired and quiet bowers, so favourable for whispered words and unmarked meetings, with which every castle of that day was most conveniently furnished.

Maillotin du Bac, in the meanwhile, continued sturdily to bear up under the repeated attacks of Burgundy upon his brain. Draught after draught he swallowed, in company with some of the old and seasoned soldiers, who were no way loth to join him; but at length the sun went down, night fell, the cresset was lighted in the large hall; and, unwillingly giving up his cup, he suffered the board to be removed, and cast himself down on a seat beside the fire, which the vast extent of the chamber, and the little sunshine that ever found its way in, either by the high window or the far door, rendered not unpleasant even on a summer's evening. A number of others gathered round; and the wine having produced sufficient effect to render them all rather more imaginative than usual, the stories of hunting and freebooters, with which the evening commonly began, in such a castle, soon deviated into tales of superstition. Every one had something wonderful to relate; and such, indeed, was the unction with which many a history of ghost, and spirit, and demon, was told by several of the party and listened to by the auditory, that two of the Lord of Imbercourt's officers, who were playing at tables under the light of the lamp, and several others, who had been amusing themselves at a little distance with the very ancient and interesting game of "pitch and toss;" abandoned those occupations, to share more fully in the legends

which were going on round the fire. Each individual helped his neighbour on upon the road of credulity; and when, at length, Maillotin du Bac rose, from a sense of duty, to visit his prisoner—an attention which he never neglected—the greater part of his companions, feeling themselves in a dwelling whose visiters were very generally reported to be more frequently of a spiritual than a corporeal nature, got up simultaneously, and agreed to accompany him on his expedition.

Lighted by a torch, they wound down some of the narrow, tortuous staircases of the building; and pausing opposite a door, the massive strength and thickness of which the Prévôt did not fail to make his comrades remark, they were soon gratified farther by beholding the inside of the dungeon in which the unhappy burgher was confined. Maillotin du Bac satisfied himself of his presence, by thrusting the torch rudely towards his face as he half sat, half reclined on a pile of straw which had been spread out for his bed; and then setting down a pitcher of wine which he had brought with him, the Prévôt closed the door again without a word. The only further ceremony was that of again slipping the key over his sword-belt, from which he had detached it to open the door; and the whole party, once more returning to upper air, separated for the night, and retired to rest.

CHAPTER IX.

Leaving the brutal officer and his companions to sleep off the fumes of the wine they had imbibed, we must return to the dungeon where, in darkness and in gloom, sat Albert Maurice, the young burgher of Ghent; whom, perhaps, the reader may have already recognised in the prisoner of Maillotin du Bac.

The silent agony of impotent indignation preyed upon his heart more painfully even than the dark and fearful anticipations of the future, which every circumstance of his situation naturally presented to his mind. Wronged, oppressed, trampled on; insulted by base and ungenerous men, whose minds were as inferior to his own as their power was superior; he cared less for the death that in all probability awaited him, than for the degra-

dation he already suffered, and for the present and future oppression of his country, his order, and his fellow-creatures, to which his hopes could anticipate no end, and for which his mind could devise no remedy. Whatever expectation Fancy might sometimes, in her wildest dreams, have suggested to his hopes, of becoming the liberator of his native land, and the general benefactor of mankind—dreams which he had certainly entertained, though he had never acted upon them—they were all extinguished at once by his arrest, and the events which he knew must follow.

That arrest had taken place, indeed, while engaged in no pursuit which the most jealous tyranny could stigmatize as even seditious. He had visited Namur with no idea of entering France—a country on which the Duke of Burgundy looked with suspicious eyes—but simply for the purpose of transacting the mercantile business which his uncle's house carried on with various traders of that city. Unfortunately, however, on his return towards Ghent, he had charged himself with several letters from different citizens of Namur, to persons in his native place. Both cities were at that time equally disaffected; and amongst the papers with which he had thus burdened himself, several had proved, under the unceremonious inspection of Maillotin du Bac, to be of a nature which might, by a little perversion, be construed into treason. The immediate cause of his first detention also—the fact of having protected a woman, insulted by one of the ruffianly soldiers of the prévôt's band, and of having punished the offender on the spot—might, as he knew well, by the aid of a little false swearing—a thing almost as common in those days as at present—be made to take the semblance of resistance to legitimate authority, and be brought to prove his connexion with the letters, of which he had been simply the bearer, unconscious of their contents.

Under such circumstances, nothing was to be expected but an ignominious death; no remedy was to be found, no refuge presented itself. Though his fellow-citizens of Ghent might revolt—though his friends and relations might murmur and complain—revolt and complaint, he well knew, would only hurry his own fate, and aggravate its circumstances, without proving at all beneficial to his country.

Had he, indeed, seen the slightest prospect of the indignation which his death would cause, wakening the people of his native

place to such great, generous, and well-directed exertions, as would permanently establish the liberties of the land, there was in his own bosom that mixture of pride, enthusiasm, and patriotism, which would have carried him to the scaffold with a feeling of triumph rather than degradation. But when his eye wandered over all those he knew in Ghent,—nay, in all Flanders,—and sought to find a man fitted by nature and by circumstances to lead and direct the struggles of the middle and lower classes against the tyranny that then oppressed the land, he could find none, in whose character and situation there were not disadvantages which would frustrate his endeavours, or render them more pernicious than beneficial to the country. His own death, he felt, must extinguish the last hope of the liberty of Flanders, at least for the time; and neither zeal nor passion could offer anything, gathered from the prospect before him, to counterbalance, even in the slightest degree, the natural antipathy of man to the awful separation of soul and body. On the contrary, every accessory particular of his fate was calculated to aggravate his distress, by accumulating upon his head indignities and wrongs. He was to be dragged into his native town amongst grooms and horse-boys, bound with cords like a common thief, paraded through the long and crowded streets in mid-day to the common prison, from whence he was alone to issue for the gibbet or the block.

Such were the subjects of his contemplation—such were the images that thronged before his mind's eye, as, with a burning heart and aching brow, and with a lip that seemed as if some evil angel had breathed upon it all the fire of his own, he lay stretched upon the straw, which was the only bed that his gaoler had afforded him.

The dungeon was all in darkness; for, either from carelessness or design, no light had been left with him. But could his face have been seen, notwithstanding the agonizing thoughts that thrilled through his bosom, none of those wild contortions would there have been traced, which affect weaker beings under the like pangs. His hand was pressed sometimes firmly upon his brow, as if to hold the throbbing veins from bursting outright; and sometimes he bit his under lip unconsciously, or shut his teeth hard, striving to prevent the despair which mastered his heart from announcing its dominion by a groan. His eye might have been seen full of keen anguish, and the bright red flushing

of his cheek might have told how strongly the body sympathized with the pangs of the mind; but all that the clearest light could have displayed would have been, an effort to repress what was passing within, not the weakness of yielding to it. He lay quite still, without one voluntary movement—he suffered not his limbs to writhe—he tossed not to and fro, in the restlessness of agony—but remained quiet, if not tranquil, though full of deep, bitter, burning, voiceless thoughts.

Thus hour passed after hour—for the wings of time, as they fly through the night of despair, are as rapid as when they cut the mid-day sky of joy—Thus hour passed after hour, from the time that the brutal prévôt closed the door of the dungeon; and the prisoner could scarcely believe that the castle clock was right, when eleven—midnight—one o'clock, chimed rapidly one after another, each leaving, between itself and the last, an interval that seemed but of a few minutes.

The single stroke upon the bell—that, echoing through the long, solitary, and now silent passages and courts of the castle, passed unheeded by the sleeping guests, and only told to the watchful warder, or the sentry, that the first hour of a new day was gone,—had scarcely sounded upon the ear of Albert Maurice when a new noise called his attention. It was a harsh, heavy, grating sound, as of some weighty body pushed slowly over a rough surface; and it appeared so near that his eye was immediately turned towards the door of the dungeon, expecting to see it open. It moved not, however: the sound still went on; and he now perceived that it did not come from that side of the cell.

The apartment itself was a low-roofed, massive chamber, just below the surface of the earth; and seemed to be partly excavated from the rock on which the castle stood, partly formed by the solid foundations of the building. A single window, or spiracle, of about twelve inches in diameter, passed upwards through the thick masonry, to the external air beyond: and one of those short, massive pillars, which we sometimes see in the crypts of very ancient churches, standing in the centre, supported the roof of the dungeon, and apparently the basement of the castle itself; under the tremendous weight of which, a fanciful mind might have conceived the column to be crushed down; so broad and clumsy were its proportions, in comparison with those of the rudest Tuscan shaft that ever upheld a portico.

From behind this pillar, the sounds that the prisoner heard appeared to proceed; and he might have imagined that some human being, confined in a neighbouring chamber, sought to communicate with him through the walls, had it not happened that he had caught the words of the Lord of Hannut in the morning; when, in speaking with Maillotin du Bac, that nobleman had declared that all the dungeons of the castle were untenanted. Still the noise continued, becoming more and more distinct every moment; and as, leaning on his arm upon his couch of straw, he gazed earnestly towards the other side of the vault, a single bright ray of light burst suddenly forth upon the darkness, and, streaming across the open space, painted a long perpendicular pencil of yellow brightness upon the wall close beside him.

Albert Maurice started upon his feet; and perceived, to his surprise, the ray he beheld issued, beyond all doubt, from the body of the pillar itself. The reputed commune of the Lord of Hannut with the beings of another world, his dark and mysterious studies, and the extraordinary fulfilment which many of his astrological predictions were reported to have met with, had often reached the ear of Albert Maurice; but his mind was too enlightened to be credulous, at least, to that extent to which credulity was generally carried in that age. All the fearful circumstances, too, of his new situation had hitherto blotted out from his memory the rumours he had heard; and when he had entered the castle of Hannut, he looked upon it merely as a place of temporary confinement, from which he was to be led to ignominy and death. Now, however, when he beheld with his own eyes a beam of light, doubly bright from the darkness around, breaking forth from the face of the solid masonry, without any obvious cause or means, all that he had heard rose to remembrance, and without absolutely giving credit to the different tales which he thus recalled, he was certainly startled and surprised; and held his breath, with a feeling of awe and expectation, as he gazed on the spot whence that mysterious ray seemed to proceed.

At the same time, the sound continued, and gradually, as it went on, the light expanded and grew more and more diffused. At length, it became evident, that a part of the massy column, about two feet from the ground, was opening in a perpendicular direction, slowly but steadily; and that the light

issued from the aperture left by the rolling back, on either side, of two of the large stones which appeared to form a principal part of the shaft. For the first few minutes, the vacancy did not extend to a hand's breadth in wideness, though to about three feet in height, and nothing could be seen beyond, but the light pouring forth from within. A minute more, however, so much increased the aperture, that Albert Maurice could perceive a gauntleted hand, and an arm clothed in steel, turning slowly round in the inside what seemed to be the winch of a wheel. The form, to which this hand and arm belonged, was for some time concealed behind the stone; but, as the opening became larger, the blocks appeared to move with greater facility, and, at length, rolling back entirely, displayed to the eyes of the prisoner a narrow staircase in the heart of the pillar, with the head, arms, and chest of a powerful man, covered with armour. Beside him stood a complicated piece of machinery; by the agency of which, two of the large stones, forming the shaft of the column, were made to revolve upon the pivots of iron, that connected them with the rest of the masonry; and in a bracket, on the stairs, was fixed the burning torch, which afforded the light that now poured into the dungeon.

Albert Maurice stood gazing in no small surprise. The feeling of awe—which, however near akin to fear, was not fear—that he had felt on first perceiving the light, was now succeeded by other sensations; and, had there been the slightest resemblance between the personal appearance of the man who stood before him, and that of Maillotin du Bac, or any of his band, he would have supposed that the purpose of the prévôt was to despatch him in prison—an event which not unfrequently took place, in the case of prisoners whose public execution might be dangerous to the tranquillity of the state.

Totally different, however, in every respect, was the person whom he now beheld; for, though his form could not well be distinguished under the armour by which he was covered, yet that armour itself was a sufficient proof, at least to Albert Maurice, that the stranger was in no way connected with the band of the prévôt. Every plate of his mail was painted of a deep, leafy green; and even his helmet, which was without crest or plume, and the visor of which was down, was of the same forest-colour. In other respects he seemed a tall, powerful man, formed equally for feats of activity and strength.

Little time was allowed the prisoner for making further observations: for, as soon as the stones had been rolled back as far as their construction permitted, the unexpected visiter at once sprang into the dungeon; though the young burgher remarked at the same time, that a leap which would have made any other arms clang, with a noise sufficient to awaken the whole castle, produced no sound from those of his new visiter.

The mechanical means which he had used to procure an entrance had, at once, banished all superstitious fancies from the mind of Albert Maurice, nor did even his noiseless tread recall them. The young burgher, however, still looked upon the man-at-arms with some feelings of doubt and astonishment; though his own presence in the dungeon was far from seeming to surprise this nocturnal visiter, who, advancing directly towards him, clasped his arm, saying, in a low voice, "Follow me!"

Albert Maurice paused: and gazed upon the stranger—over whose green armour the flashing red light of the torch cast a fitful and unpleasant glare—with a glance of suspicion and hesitation; but his irresolution was removed at once, by the other demanding, in the same clear and distinct, but low tone, "Can you be worse than you are here?"

"Lead on," he replied; "I follow you."

"Pass through," said his visiter, pointing with his hand to the aperture in the column. Albert Maurice again hesitated: but a moment's reflection upon the hopelessness of his situation—the inefficacy of resistance, even if anything evil were meditated against him—together with the thought, that it were better to die, murdered in a prison, than to be exposed, as a spectacle to the multitude, by public execution, mingled with a strong hope, that relief was at hand, though he knew not whence that relief might come—made him cast away all doubts; and, stepping over the mass of stone, below the aperture, he found himself in a staircase only sufficiently large to admit the ascent or descent of one person at a time. The secret entrance, which it afforded to that dungeon, seemed its only object; for, to all appearance, it was carried up no farther through the column; the space above being occupied by the machinery for moving the blocks of stone.

"Descend a few steps," said the stranger, "that I may close the passage." And as soon as he found himself obeyed, he also entered the gap; and applying the full strength of his powerful

arm to the winch which moved the machinery, he succeeded, in a few minutes, in rolling the heavy blocks so exactly back into their places in the masonry, that not even in the inside could it be seen that they did not form a part of the wall of the staircase.

When this was accomplished, he said, in the same abrupt manner in which he had before spoken, "Go on!" and then followed the prisoner, holding the torch as far before him as possible, to let the other see the way as he descended step by step. After having proceeded for about fifteen or twenty yards, Albert Maurice found his further progress opposed by a strong oaken door, but it was unlocked; and having pushed it open by the desire of his conductor, he stepped forth into a small vaulted chamber, not unlike in shape the dungeon he had just left. The light of another torch which was burning there, however, displayed various objects strewed about in different parts of the room, which showed him at once that the purposes to which it was applied were very different from those of the cell above. Several cloaks and gowns were piled upon a bench close to the door; and across them leaned, with one end resting on the floor, a common pike or reiter's lance, and a large two-handed sword. A barrel of wine, or some other liquor, occupied one corner of the apartment; and in the midst was placed a table, on which stood a large leathern bottle, or *bottiau*, with two or three drinking horns.

Sitting on a bench at the far end of this table, on which his head and arms rested, was a man apparently sound asleep. He was armed all but his head, which was covered alone by its own long tangled black hair; but his armour was of a very different kind from that of the stranger who had guided Albert Maurice thither, consisting alone of one of those light suits of body mail, which were called brigandines; and the common use of which, amongst the lawless soldiers of the day, had acquired for them the name of brigands. The general hue of his whole dress, however, was green, like his companion's, and Albert Maurice was soon led to conceive, that he was in the hands of a party of those bold adventurers, who in that part of the country had succeeded the schwarz reiters, or black horsemen, and had obtained, from the general colour of their dress, the title of green riders. It is true that the latter had displayed, upon all occasions, a much more generous and noble spirit than their predecessors, whose

sole trade was blood and carnage. As they abstained totally from plundering the peasants, and directed their attacks in general against persons who were in some way obnoxious to the better part of the population, the green riders were far from unpopular throughout the country. Many of them were known to show themselves familiarly at village feasts and merry-makings; and upon the borders of France and Flanders, their general name had been changed, from these circumstances, into that of *Les Verts Gallants*, though it seemed that their principal leader was more particularly distinguished by this appellation. Nor was the acquisition of this pleasant title the only effect of their popularity, which produced for themselves a much more beneficial result, by making both peasant and burgher, and even many of the feudal lords themselves, anxious to connive at the escape of the green riders, whenever they were pursued by superior bodies of troops.

Into the hands of some one of their parties Albert Maurice now clearly saw that he had fallen; and as the sort of romantic life which they led had caused a thousand stories to be spread concerning them—some strange and extraordinary enough, but none more common than that of their finding access into towns and castles without any visible means,—their connexion with the dwelling of the Lord of Hannut required no explanation to the young citizen.

The moment he had entered the chamber which we have just described, the Vert Gallant, as we shall henceforth term the person who had led Albert Maurice thither, closed the heavy door which cut off the communication with the staircase, and locked and barred it with no small precaution. Advancing towards the table, he shook the slumberer by the shoulder, who, starting up, merely required a sign to place himself in the position of a sentry, at the mouth of a dark passage which led from the other side of the chamber.

"Now, Sir Burgher," said the Vert Gallant, approaching Albert Maurice, "you have penetrated into places which the eye of none of your cast or craft ever beheld before; and, as you have been led thither solely for your benefit and safety, you must take a serious oath, for the security of those who have conferred upon you so great a favour."

"That I will willingly," replied Albert Maurice, "although

Heaven only knows whether it may prove a benefit to me or not."

"Rule yourself by my directions," replied the other, "and fear not for the result; but first for the oath." So saying, he unsheathed his sword, and holding up the cross which formed the hilt, before the eyes of the young burgher, he added, "Swear by this blessed symbol of our salvation, by your faith in the Saviour who died upon the cross, by your hope for his aid at your utmost need, by all that you hold dear upon the earth and sacred beyond the earth, never to reveal, by word, sign, or token, or in any other manner whatever, anything that you have seen from the moment that you quitted the dungeon above, or that you may see as I lead you hence."

"Willingly do I swear," replied Albert Maurice, and he pressed the hilt of the sword upon his lips. "Nevertheless," he added, "for the security of all, fair sir, I would rather that, by bandaging my eyes, you should take from me the means of betraying you, even if I would."

"Hast thou no confidence in thine own honour?" demanded the Vert Gallant. "If so, by the Lord, I regret that I took the trouble to save so scurvy a clown!"

The eye of the prisoner flashed, and his cheek grew red; but, after a moment's pause, he replied, "Not so. It is not that I doubt my own honour, for I have sworn not to betray you, or to reveal anything that I may see; and that torture has not yet been invented by the demons who are permitted to rule so much upon our earth, that could tear from me one word in violation of that oath. Nevertheless, sir, I would rather be able to say that I cannot, than that I will not tell, and therefore I proposed the means at which you scoff without cause."

"Thou art right, and I am wrong, stranger," answered the other. "Be it so then. With this scarf I will bind up thine eyes. But first," he added, "take a draught of wine, for thou wilt have to travel far ere morning."

So saying, he filled one of the horns upon the table to the brim, and presented it to the young burgher, who drank it off. The Vert Gallant himself, however, did not unclose the visor of his helmet, to partake of the beverage he gave to the other. As soon as the citizen had drained the cup, his guide took the scarf from the bench, and bound it over his eyes, saying with a light

laugh as he did so, "I am clumsy at the work with these gauntlets on, but better have my fingers busy at thy temples, than the hangman's busy at thy neck. Now give me thy hand," he added; "the way is rough, so mind thy footing as we go."

Albert Maurice was now led forward to the mouth of the passage, at which the other adventurer stood; and he then advanced for some way over an uneven pavement, till at length he was told that there were steps to descend. Of these there were about thirty, and he remarked, as he went down, that the air became very close and oppressive. He thought, too, that he heard many voices speaking and laughing beyond; and as he proceeded, it became clear that it was so, for by the time he and his guide had reached the bottom of the descent, the sound of merriment burst clear upon his ear. "Now, pause for a moment," said his companion, and at the same time he struck three hard blows with his mailed hand, upon what seemed to be a door. All instantly became silent within, and then a single blow upon the woodwork was struck from the other side. It was answered in the same manner, by one stroke more; and the next moment—after some clattering and grating caused by the turning of more than one key, and by the removing of more than one large bar—the door was apparently thrown open; and Albert Maurice could tell, by the freer air which he breathed, that he was led forward into some apartment of much larger dimensions than any he had yet seen. No voice was heard; but the sound of moving feet, and of seats pushed on one side, as well as the steam of wine and dressed meats, showed clearly that they had now entered some scene of late or present festivity. The person who had conducted him thither soon let go his hand, but at the same time he heard his voice, exclaiming, "Now, unbind his eyes for a few minutes! —Have my orders been obeyed?"

While several voices were busily answering this question, by detailing the despatch of a number of messengers, as it seemed, in different directions, and for purposes which Albert Maurice could not gather from what was said, two persons undid the scarf which had been tied round his head, and he suddenly found himself in a scene which may need a more detailed description.

The apartment in which he stood, if apartment it could be called, was neither more nor less than an immense cavern, or excavation in the limestone rock, from which, as it bore evidently the traces of human labour, it is probable that at some remote

period the stone for constructing one or several large buildings had been hewn out. In height it might be twenty or five and twenty feet, and in width it was considerably more; the length was about eighty yards, and the farther end, on one side, was closed by a wooden partition. Over head the rock was left rough and irregular, but the sides, very nearly to the top, were perpendicular, and tolerably smooth, while the floor, or rather the ground, had of course been made as level as possible in its original construction, for the purpose of rolling out the blocks of stone with greater facility. Extending down the centre of this spacious apartment was a table, covered with various sorts of food. The viands which it sustained consisted chiefly of immense masses of solid meat, amongst which, though beef and mutton bore a certain share, yet the stag, the wild boar, and the fallow deer, with other of the forest tenants, had contributed not a little to make up the entertainment. On either side of this table, which, by the way, was itself formed of planks, bearing traces of the saw much more evidently than those of the plane, were ranged an innumerable multitude of benches, stools, and settles of the same rude description. From these had risen up, as it seemed, on the entrance of the prisoner and his companion, the mixed population of the cavern, consisting of nearly two hundred cavaliers, as sturdy, and, apparently, as veteran as ever drew sword or mounted horse; and, when the bandage was removed from the eyes of the young citizen, he found that a number of those whose habiliments seemed to point them out as the most distinguished, were thronging round the person who had led him thither.

"John and Nicholas have gone to the west," cried one, "to tell the band of St. Bavon to keep beyond Ramilies."—"Adolph of Sluy," cried another, "has tidings by this time that he must remain within the bounds of Liege."—"The little monk, too," said an old white-headed man, of a florid, healthy complexion, which showed that time had hitherto wrestled with him nearly in vain,—"the little monk, too, is trotting away on his mule towards Mierdorp, though he complained bitterly of being obliged to set out before the feast was on the table, and has carried away, in his wallet, a roasted hare from the fire, as long as my arm, and a bottle of the old Bonne that we got out of the cellar of Ambly."

"He shall feast well another time for his pains," replied the

Vert Gallant, moving towards the head of the table, at which a large armed chair, like a throne, stood vacant,—"he shall feast well another time for his pains, good Matthew; but we must make this stranger taste of our hospitality while the horses are saddling without. Sit down, Sir Citizen," he added, turning to Albert Maurice, "sit down, and refresh yourself before you go;" and he pointed to a vacant seat by his side.

"I thank you, sir," replied the young burgher; "but the grief I have undergone, and the anxieties I have suffered, have dulled the edge of appetite with me more than the banquet of a prince could have done; and I would fain see myself once more upon my road to Ghent, if such be the fate intended for me."

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed the old man whom we have before noticed. "See what frail things these townsmen are, that a little anxiety and fear should take away their appetite; but thou wilt drink, good friend, if thou wilt not eat. Here, merry men all, fill to the brim, and drink with me to our noble leader,—'Here 's to the Vert Gallant of Hannut!'"

The proposal was like an electric shock to all. Each man started on his feet, and with loud voice and overflowing cup, drank, "To the Vert Gallant of Hannut! and may the sword soon restore to him what the sword took from him!"

"Thank you, my friends, thank you," replied the Vert Gallant, as soon as their acclamation had subsided,—"I drink to you all. May I need your aid and not find it, when I forget you!" and, so saying, he raised the visor of his helmet sufficiently to allow himself to bring the cup to his lip. The eye of the young burgher fixed eagerly upon him, anxious, as may be well supposed, to behold the countenance of a man holding such an extraordinary station. What was his surprise, however, when the small degree in which the leader of the green riders suffered his face to appear, exposed to view the countenance of a negro.

CHAPTER X.

An involuntary exclamation of astonishment burst from the lips of Albert Maurice; and the Vert Gallant instantly closed his he'met.

"Now, Sir Citizen," he said, without noticing the other's surprise, "we will once more forward on our way. Some one bind his eyes again; and you, good friend, lend me your ear for a moment. Mark well," he said, speaking in a lower voice to the elder man already mentioned,—"mark well that all the precautions are taken which I ordered. Be sure the tracks of the horses' feet, for more than a mile, be completely effaced. Roll the large stones down, as I told you, over the mouth, and let not a man show his head during the whole day. If, notwithstanding all, you should be discovered, and the fools will rush upon their fate, send round fifty men by the back of the rock, and on your life, let not one of the band escape. I say not slay them: take every man to mercy that is willing; but suffer not one living man to pass the bounds of the forest if they once discover you. If, however, they miss the track entirely, as doubtless they will, then, should I not see you before to-morrow night, pick me out fifty of the best riders, and the quickest handed men; let their horses be kept saddled, and not a break in their mail; for I do not purpose that this prévôt should hie him back to Brussels without being met withal."

By the time the Vert Gallant had given these directions, the scarf was once more bound round the eyes of Albert Maurice, and he was again led forward by the hand, apparently passing through several halls and passages. In one instance, the peculiar smell of horses, and the various sounds that he heard, convinced him that he was going through a stable; and, in a few minutes after, receiving a caution to walk carefully, he was guided down a steep descent, at the end of which the free open air blew cool upon his cheek. The bandage was not removed, however, for some moments, though, by feeling the grass and withered leaves beneath his feet, he discovered that he was once more under the boughs of the forest.

At length the voice of him who had been his conductor throughout, desired him to halt, and uncover his eyes, which

he accordingly did, and found himself, as he expected, in the deepest part of the wood.

"Now follow me on, Sir Citizen!" said the Vert Gallant, "and as we go, I will tell you how you must conduct yourself. Make your way straight to Mierdorp, where you will arrive probably about the grey of the dawn. As you are going into the village, you will be joined by a certain monk, to whom you will say, 'Good morrow, Father Barnabas,' and he will immediately conduct you on your road towards Namur. Halt with him at the village where you were first arrested. Speak with the syndic, or deacon, or any other officer of the place, and get together all the written testimony you can concerning the cause of your arrest. Then return to Ghent if you will. It may be that no accuser ever will appear against you, but if there should, boldly appeal to the Princess Mary, who is left behind by her father at Ghent. State the real circumstances which caused your arrest at Gembloux, and call upon your accuser to bring forward any proofs against you. But mark well, and remember, walk not late by night. Go not forth into the streets alone. Always have such friends and companions about you as may witness your arrest, and second your appeal to the princess. For there are such things, Sir Citizen, as deaths in prison without judgment."

"I shall remember with gratitude, sir," replied the young burgher, "all that you have been pleased to say, and all that you have done in my behalf. But on one point I must needs think you mistake. If I know where I am rightly, we are full sixteen miles from Mierdorp,—a distance which would take four good hours to walk. The castle clock has just struck three, so that it may be broad day, and not merely dawn, before I can reach that place."

"Fear not, fear not," replied the stranger, "you shall have the means of reaching it in time; but follow me quick, for the hours wear." Thus saying, he strode on through the trees and brushwood, pursuing a path, which, though totally invisible to the eyes of his companion, he seemed to tread with the most perfect certainty. Sometimes the occasional underwood appeared to cover it over entirely; and often the sweeping boughs of the higher trees drooped across it, and dashed the night dew upon the clothes of the travellers, as they pushed through them; but still the Vert Gallant led on. In about ten minutes, the glancing rays of the sinking moon, seen shining

through the leaves before them, showed that they were coming to some more open ground; and the next moment they stood upon the principal road which traversed the forest.

By the side of the highway, with an ordinary groom holding the bridle, stood a strong, bony horse; and the only further words that were spoken, were, "The road lies straight before you to the west; mount, and God speed you. Give the horse to the monk when you are in safety."

"A thousand thanks and blessings on your head!" replied the young burgher; and springing with easy grace into the saddle, he struck the horse with his heel, and darted off towards Mierdorp.

"A likely cavalier as ever I saw!" exclaimed the Vert Gallant. "Now, to cover, to cover," he added, turning to the groom, and once more plunged into the forest.

In the meanwhile Albert Maurice rode on; and with his personal adventures we shall now be compelled to proceed for some way, leaving the other characters for fate to play with as she lists, till we have an opportunity of resuming their history also.

The horse that bore the young burgher, though not the most showy that ever underwent the saddle, proved strong, swift, and willing; and as it is probably impossible for a man just liberated from prison, with the first sense of recovered freedom fresh upon him, to ride slowly, Albert Maurice dashed on for some way at full speed. His mind had adopted, without a moment's doubt or hesitation, the plan which had been pointed out to him by the leader of the adventurers, as the very best which, under his present circumstances, he could pursue; and this conviction—together with the proofs he had already received that the wishes of the Vert Gallant were friendly and generous towards himself, and the intimate knowledge which his deliverer had displayed of his affairs,—made him resolve to follow implicitly his directions. Although this resolution was brought about by the mental operation of a single moment, it is not to be supposed that the various events which had befallen him, since entering the castle of Hannut, had not produced on his mind all those effects of wonder, surprise, and doubt, which they might naturally be expected to cause in the bosom of any person so circumstanced.

There were a thousand things that he could not in any way account for, and which we shall not attempt to account for either. The interest which his deliverer had taken in his fate;

the means by which he had acquired such an exact knowledge of his situation; the existence of so large a band of free companions, notwithstanding the many efforts which the Duke of Burgundy had made to put them down, were all matters of astonishment. He had felt, however, during his short intercourse with the green riders, that neither the time, the place, nor the circumstances admitted of any inquiry upon the subject; and with a prompt decision, which was one great trait in his character, while he took advantage of the means of escape offered to him, he had suppressed as far as possible every word which might have betrayed surprise or curiosity. As he rode on, however, he pondered on all that had happened; and he doubted not, that, now he was at liberty to seek and collect the proofs of his innocence, he should find little difficulty in clearing himself from any absolute crime, if his cause were submitted to a regular tribunal. Unfortunately, this did not always occur. In most of the continental states the will of the prince was law; and too often the same absolute jurisdiction was exercised by his officers. This was especially the case in respect to Maillotin du Bac, who, in one morning, had been known to arrest and hang thirty persons, without any form of trial or judicial investigation.

Nevertheless, all these circumstances seemed to have been fully considered by the Vert Gallant; and the means he had pointed out of an appeal to the Princess Mary, in case of unjust persecution, were, as the young burgher well knew, the only ones that could prove efficacious.

So well had the distance and the horse's speed been calculated, that, at about two miles from Mierdorp, that undefinable grey tint, which can hardly be called light, but is the first approach towards it, began to spread upwards over the eastern sky; and by the time that Albert Maurice emerged from the forest of Hannut, which then extended to within a mile of the village, the air was all rosy with the dawn of day. Just as he was issuing forth from the woodland, he perceived before him a stout, short, round figure, clothed in a long grey gown, the cowl or hood of which was thrown back upon his shoulders, leaving a polished bald head to shine uncovered in the rays of the morning; and the young fugitive paused to examine the person whom he had by this time nearly overtaken.

The monk, for so he appeared to be, was mounted on a stout, fat mule, whose grey skin, and sleek, rotund limbs, gave

him a ridiculous likeness to his rider, which was increased by a sort of vacant sentimentality that appeared in the round face of the monk, and the occasional slow raising and dropping of one of the mule's ears, in a manner which bears no other epithet but the very colloquial one of *lack-a-daisical.*

According to the instructions he had received, the young burgher immediately rode up to the monk, and addressed him with the "Good morrow, Father Barnabas," which he had been directed to employ.

"Good morrow, my son," replied the monk; "though unhappily for me, sinner that I am, my patron saint is a less distinguished one than him whose name you give me; I am called Father Charles, not Father Barnabas."

As he thus spoke he looked up in the young traveller's face with an air of flat unmeaningness, which would at once have convinced Albert Maurice that he was mistaken in the person, had he not discovered a small ray of more intellectual expression beam the next moment through the dull, grey eye of the monk, while something curled, and just curled, the corners of his mouth with what did not deserve the name of a smile, and yet was far too faint for a grin.

"Well," said he, eyeing him keenly, "if your name be not Barnabas, good father, I will give you good morrow once more, and ride on."

"Good morrow, my son," replied the monk, with the same demure smile; and Albert Maurice, to be as good as his word, put his horse into a trot, in order to make the best of his way towards Mierdorp, which was lying in the fresh, sweet light of morning, at the distance of about three quarters of a mile before him. To his surprise, however, the monk's mule, without any apparent effort of its rider, the moment he quickened his horse's pace, put itself into one of those long, easy ambles for which mules are famous, and without difficulty carried its master on by his side.

"You are in haste, my son," said the monk: "whither away so fast?"

"I go to seek Father Barnabas," replied the young burgher, somewhat provoked, but yet half laughing at the quiet merriment of the monk's countenance as he rode along beside him on his mule, with every limb as round as if he had been formed out of a series of pumpkins.

"Well, well," rejoined the monk, "perhaps I may aid you in your search; but what wouldst thou with Father Barnabas, when thou hast found him? Suppose I were Father Barnabas now, what wouldst thou say to me?"

"I would say nothing," answered Albert Maurice; "but —let us on our way."

"So be it, then," replied the other; "but one thing, good brother, it does not become me to go jaunting over the country with profane laymen; therefore if we are to journey forward together, you must don the frock, and draw the hood over your head, to hide that curly black hair. So turn your horse's bridle rein before we get into the village, and behind those old hawthorn bushes, I will see whether my wallet does not contain the wherewithal to make thee as good a monk as myself."

As it now became sufficiently evident to the young citizen that he was not deceived in the person whom he had addressed, he acquiesced in his proposal; and turning down a little lane to their right hand, they dismounted from their beasts behind a small, thick clump of aged thorns, and the monk soon produced, from a large leathern wallet which he carried behind him, a grey gown, exactly similar to his own, which completely covered and concealed the handsome form of the young citizen. The cowl having been drawn over his head, and the frock bound round his middle by a rope, they once more mounted; and pursuing their way together, soon found means to turn the conversation to the direct object which they had in view, with which it appeared the monk was fully acquainted.

The ice having been once broken, Albert Maurice found his companion a shrewd, intelligent man, with a strong touch of roguish humour, which, though partly concealed under an affectation of stolidity, had grown into such a habit of jesting, that it seemed scarcely possible to ascertain when he was serious, and when he was not. This, however, might be, in some degree, assumed; for it is wonderful how often deep feelings and deep designs, intense affection, towering ambition, and even egregious cunning itself, attempt to cover themselves by different shades of playful gaiety, knowing that the profundity of a deep stream is often hidden by the light ripple on its surface.

However that might be, the young citizen's new companion was anything but wanting in sense, and proved of the greatest assistance to him, by his keen foresight and knowledge of the world.

With his co-operation Albert Maurice, at the little town of Gembloux, at which he had been arrested by Maillotin du Bac, obtained full and sufficient evidence, written down by the magistrate of the place, to prove that the first squabble between himself and the prévôt had arisen in a wanton aggression committed by one of the soldiers of the latter; and that before that officer had opened any of the papers in his possession, he had sworn, with a horrible oath, that for striking his follower, he would hang him over the gates of Ghent. All this was attested in due form; and satisfied that half the dangers of his situation were gone, Albert Maurice gladly turned his horse's head towards his native place. The monk still accompanied him, saying that he had orders not to leave him till he was safe within the walls of Ghent,—"seeing that you are such a sweet, innocent lamb," he added, "that you are not to be trusted amongst the wolves of this world alone."

Their journey passed over, however, without either danger or difficulty; for though at Gembloux Albert Maurice had laid aside the frock, as his very inquiries would of course have made his person known, he had resumed it, by the monk's desire, as soon as they had quitted that town; and the garb procured them a good reception in all the places at which they paused upon the road.

As they approached Ghent, Father Barnabas thought fit to take new precautions; and requested his young companion to make use of the mule which he had hitherto ridden himself, while he mounted the horse. He also drew his own cowl far over his head; nor were these steps in vain, as they very soon had occasion to experience.

They reached the gates of Ghent towards sunset, on a fine clear evening, and passed through many a group of peasantry, returning from the market in the city to their rural occupations. On these the monk showered his benedictions very liberally; but Albert Maurice remarked that, as they approached a small party of soldiers near the gate, his companion assumed an air of military erectness, and caused his horse to prance and curvet like a war steed. Perhaps, had he noticed what the keen eye of the monk had instantly perceived, that two of the soldiers were examining them as they came up with more than ordinary care, he might have guessed that the object of all this parade of horsemanship was to draw attention upon himself, as a skilful

conjurer forces those to whom he offers the cards to take the very one he wishes, without their being conscious of his doing so.

"Ventre Saint Gris!" cried one of the soldiers to the other, as they came near. "It must be him! That is no monk, Jenkin! He rides like a reiter—Pardi! I will see, however.—Father, your cowl is awry!" he added, laying his hand upon the monk's bridle rein, and snatching at his hood as if for the sake of an insolent joke. The cowl instantly fell back under his hand, exposing the fat bald head of the friar; and the soldier, with a broad laugh, retired, disappointed, amongst his companions, suffering the young citizen, who, on the still, quiet mule, had escaped without observation, to proceed with the monk to the dwelling of good Martin Fruse, which they reached without further annoyance or interruption.

CHAPTER XI.

Although the soldiers that Albert Maurice and his companion had passed at the gate, with the usual reckless gaiety of their profession, had been found laughing lightly, and jesting with each other, yet it soon became evident to the eyes of the travellers, as they passed onward through the long irregular streets of the city, that something had occurred to affect the population of Ghent in an unusual manner.

Scarce a soul was seen abroad; and there was a sort of boding calmness in the aspect of the whole place, as they rode on, which taught them to expect important tidings of some kind, from the first friend they should meet. The misty evening sunshine streamed down the far perspective of the streets, casting long and defined shadows from the fountains and the crosses, and also from the houses, that every here and there obtruded their insolent gables beyond the regular line of the other buildings; but no lively groups were seen amusing themselves at the corners, or by the canals; no sober citizens sitting out before their doors, in all the rich and imposing colours of Flemish costume, to enjoy the cool tranquillity of the evening, after the noise, and the bustle, and the heat of an active summer's day.

One or two persons, indeed, might be observed with their heads close together, and the important forefinger laid with all the energy of demonstration in the palm of the other hand, while the party gossiped eagerly over some great event, each one fancying himself fit to lead hosts and to govern kingdoms; and every now and then some rapid figure, with consequence in all its steps, was remarked flitting from house to house, the receptacle and carrier of all the rumours of the day.

Though in one of the last named class of personages whom Albert Maurice met as he advanced, he recognised an acquaintance, yet, for many reasons, he only drew the cowl more completely over his face; and, secure in the concealment of the monk's frock that covered him, rode on, till he reached the house of his uncle, Martin Fruse, which he judged to be a more secure asylum than his own, till such time as his resolutions were taken, and his plans arranged.

The dwelling of the worthy burgher, though occupying no inconsiderable part of one of the principal streets, had its private entrance in a narrower one branching to the south-west; and the tall houses on either hand, acting as complete screens between the portal and the setting sun, gave at least an hour's additional darkness to the hue of evening.

So deep, indeed, was the gloom, and so completely did the friar's gown conceal the person of Albert Maurice, that one of his uncle's oldest servants, who was standing in the entrance, did not in any degree recognise his young master, though it was his frequent boast that he had borne the young citizen—the pink of the youth of Ghent—upon his knee a thousand times when he was no higher than an ell wand. Even the familiar stride with which Albert Maurice entered the long, dark passage, as soon as he had dismounted from his mule, did not undeceive him; and he ran forward into the large sitting room, which lay at the end of the vestibule, announcing that two monks, somewhat of the boldest, had just alighted at the door.

He was followed straight into the apartment of Martin Fruse by that worthy citizen's nephew, who immediately found himself in the midst of half a dozen of the richest burghers of the town, enjoying an hour of social converse with their wealthy neighbour before they retired to their early rest. It would seem to belong more to the antiquary than to the historian to describe the appearance of the chamber, or the dress of the personages who

were seated on benches around it; and it may suffice to say, that the furred gowns, and gold chains, which decorated the meeting, sufficiently evinced the municipal dignity of the guests.

At the moment of his nephew's entrance, Martin Fruse was upon his feet, following round a serving boy, who, with a small silver cup, and flask of the same metal, was distributing to each of the burghers a modicum of a liquor now, alas! too common, but which was then lately invented, and was known—from the many marvellous qualities attributed to it—by the name of *Eau de vie.*

"Take but one small portion—" said the worthy citizen to one of his companions, who made some difficulty; "not more than a common spoonful. Do not the best leeches in Europe recommend it as a sovereign cure for all diseases, and a preservation against bad air? It warms the stomach, strengthens the bones, clears the head, and promotes all the functions. And, truly, these are sad and troublous times, wherein cordials are necessary, and every man requires such consolation as he can find. Alack, and a well-a-day! who would have thought——"

But the speech of good Martin Fruse was brought to a sudden conclusion by the entrance of his man, announcing the coming of the two monks; which notice was scarcely given, when Albert Maurice himself appeared. Before entering, the young citizen had paused one moment to cast off the friar's gown, on account of the strange voices he heard as he advanced along the passage, and he now showed himself in his usual travelling dress, though his apparel was somewhat disarranged, and he appeared without cap or bonnet.

"Welcome, welcome, my fair nephew!" cried Martin Fruse, who looked upon Albert with no small pride and deference. "Sirs, here is my nephew Albert, come, at a lucky hour, to give us his good counsel and assistance in the strange and momentous circumstances in which we are placed."

"Welcome, most welcome, good Master Maurice!" cried a number of voices at once. "Welcome, most welcome!" and the young traveller, instantly surrounded by his fellow-citizens, was eagerly congratulated on his return, which had apparently been delayed longer than they had expected or had wished. At the same time, the often repeated words, "Perilous times—extraordinary circumstances—dangers to the state—anxious expectations," and a number of similar expressions, showed him

that the opinion he had formed, from the appearance of the town as he passed through the streets, was perfectly correct, and that some events of general and deep importance had taken place.

"I see," he said, in reply, after having answered their first salutations,—"I see that something must have occurred with which I am unacquainted. Remember, my good friends, that I have been absent from the city for some weeks; and, for the last four or five days, I have been in places where I was not likely to hear any public tidings."

"What!" cried one, "have you not heard the news?—that the duke has been beaten near the lake of Neufchatel, and all the forces with which he was besieging Morat, have been killed or taken?"

"How!" exclaimed another, "have you not heard that the Duke of Lorrain is advancing towards Flanders with all speed?"

"Some say he will be at Ghent in a week," cried a third.

"But the worst news of all," said a fourth, in a solemn and mysterious tone, "is, that a squire, who arrived at the palace last night, saw the duke stricken from his horse by a Swiss giant with a two-handed sword; and, according to all accounts, he never rose again."

"Good God! is it possible?" exclaimed Albert Maurice, as all these baleful tidings poured in at once upon his ear, with a rapidity which afforded him scarcely an opportunity of estimating the truth of each as he received it, and left him no other feeling for the time than pain at the ocean of misfortunes which had overwhelmed his country—though he looked upon the prince, who had immediately suffered, as a brutal despot; and upon the nobles, who in general bore the brunt of battle or defeat, as a number of petty tyrants more insupportable than one great one.—"Good God! is it possible?" he exclaimed: "but are you sure, my friends," he continued, after a moment's pause, "that all this news is true? Rumour is apt to exaggerate, and increases evil tidings tenfold, where she only doubles good news? Are these reports quite sure?"

"Oh! they are beyond all doubt," replied one of the merchants, with a slight curl of the lip. "The Lord of Imbercourt, who was on his march to join the army, when he was found by couriers bearing these evil tidings, returned with his spears in all haste to Ghent, in order to guard against any disturbance, as

he said, and to keep the rebellious commons under the rule of law."

The man who spoke thus, was a small, dark, insignificant looking person, whose figure would not have attracted a moment's attention, and whose face might have equally passed without notice, had not the keen sparkling light of two clear black eyes, which seemed to wander constantly about in search of other people's thoughts, given at least some warning that there was a subtle, active, and intriguing soul concealed within that diminutive and unprepossessing form. His name was Ganay: by profession he was a druggist, and the chief, in that city, of a trade, which differed considerably from that of the druggist of the present day. It was, indeed, one of no small importance in a great manufacturing town like Ghent, where all the different fabrics required, more or less, some of those ingredients which he imported from foreign countries.

In pronouncing the last words, "to keep the rebellious commons under the rule of law," Master Ganay fixed his keen black eyes upon the face of Albert Maurice with an expression of inquiring eagerness, partly proceeding from an anxious desire to see into the heart of the young citizen—whose character the other fully estimated—partly from a design to lead him, by showing him what was expected from him, to say something which might discover his views and feelings.

He was deceived, however: the very knowledge that his words were to be marked, put the young citizen upon his guard; and, conscious that there were mighty events gathering round,—that his own situation was precarious,—and that of his country still more so,—he felt the necessity of obtaining perfect certainty with regard to the facts, and of indulging deep reflection in regard to the consequences, before he committed himself in the irretrievable manner which is sometimes effected by a single word.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; "ha! did he say so?"—and he was about to drop the dangerous part of the subject, by some common observation, when another of the burghers changed the immediate topic of conversation, from the higher and more important themes which had been lately before them, to matters much more familiar to the thoughts of the citizens.

"But there is more intelligence still, good Master Albert Maurice," exclaimed a little fat merchant, whose face expressed all that extravagant desire of wondering, and of exciting wonder,

which goes greatly to form the character of a newsmonger;—"but there is more intelligence still, which you will be delighted to hear, as a good citizen, and a friend to honest men. That pitiful, prying, bloodthirsty tyrant, Maillotin du Bac, was brought into the town to-day in a litter, beaten so sorely, that they say there is not a piece of his skin so big as a Florence crown which is not both black and blue. Faith, I wonder that the honest men of the wood did not hang him to one of their own trees."

"Ha!" again exclaimed Albert Maurice, but in a tone far more raised with surprise than before, "how did he meet with such a mishap? He boasted that he would not leave a *routier*, or a free companion in the land."

A low chuckle just behind him, as he pronounced these words, recalled suddenly to his memory, that he had been followed into the room by the monk called Father Barnabas; and, congratulating himself that he had suffered not a syllable to escape his lips that might commit him in any degree, he turned towards the companion of his journey, who, in the haste and confusion with which all these tidings had been poured forth upon him, had been forgotten by himself and overlooked by the others.

A few sentences in explanation of his appearance, and in general reference to great services received from him on the road, instantly called upon Father Barnabas the good-humoured civilities and attention of Martin Fruse, and might have turned the conversation to other matters, had not the monk himself seemed determined to hear more of the drubbing which had been bestowed upon Maillotin du Bac.

"Verily, poor gentleman," he exclaimed, in a tone in which the merriment so far predominated over the commiseration, as to render it much more like the voice of malice than of pity;—"verily, poor gentleman, he must be in a sad case. How met he with such a terrible accident?"

"Why, father, you shall hear," replied the newsmonger, eager to disburden his wallet of information upon a new ear; "what I am going to tell you is quite true, I can assure you, for my maid Margaret's sister is going to be married to one of the soldiers of the prévôt's band. It seems that they had searched the forest of Hannut all day in vain, for a body of the green riders who had taken refuge there, and also for a prisoner who had made his escape; and towards night they were making for Hal, because they would not go back to Hannut, as the prévôt had

some quarrel with the chatelain, when suddenly, in the little wood, near Braine-la-Leud, they were met by a party of fifty free companions, who drew up right across their way. The captain, who, they say, was the famous Vert Gallant of Hannut himself, singled out the prévôt, and at the very first charge of the two bands brought him to the ground with his lance. Du Bac, however, was not hurt, and at first refused to yield; but the Vert Gallant cudgelled him with the staff of his lance, till there was not a piece of his armour would hold together. He would not kill him, it seems; and when the whole of the band were dispersed, which they were in five minutes, with the exception of five or six who were taken prisoners, the Vert Gallant struck off the prévôt's spurs with his axe, and, telling him that he was a false traitor, and no true knight, sent him back to Ghent, with all the others who had been taken."

While the burgher was detailing these particulars, the small grey roguish eyes of the monk stole from time to time a glance at the face of Albert Maurice with an expression of merriment, triumph, and malice, all mingled intimately together, but subdued into a look of quiet fun, which elicited a smile from the lip of the young citizen, though the tale he had just heard furnished him with matter for more serious reflection. The eyes of the druggist also fixed upon him, while the story of the prévôt's discomfiture was told by their companion; and the smile which he saw play upon the face of the young burgher seemed to furnish him with information of what was passing in the mind within, sufficient at least for his own purposes; for from that moment he appeared to pay little farther attention to the subject before them, otherwise than by mingling casually in the conversation that succeeded.

That conversation became soon of a rambling and desultory nature, wandering round the great political events of the day, the fate of their country, the state of the city itself, and the future prospects of the land, without, however, approaching so near to the dangerous matter which was probably in the heart of every one, as to call forth words that could not be retracted. In fact, each person present felt burdened by great but ill-arranged thoughts; and those who saw most deeply into the abyss before them, were the least inclined to venture their opinions ere they heard those of others.

With that sort of intuitive perception which some men have

of what is passing in the breasts of those around them, Albert Maurice, without the slightest exertion of cunning or shrewdness, —without one effort to draw forth the thoughts of those by whom he was surrounded,—comprehended clearly the peculiar modifications under which each one present was revolving in his own mind what advantages might be derived from—what opportunities might be afforded by—the discomfiture and death of Charles the Bold, for recovering those immunities and privileges which that prince had wrung from Ghent, after they had been too often abused by her citizens. His first thought had been of the same nature also: but the mention of Maillotin du Bac had suddenly recalled to his mind his own particular circumstances and situation; and it must be confessed, that, for a few minutes, it was entirely directed to the consideration of how greatly his own personal safety might be ensured by the events, the news of which had reached Ghent during his absence.

The moment after, however, he upbraided himself for his selfishness; and, casting all individual considerations away, he determined to bend the whole energies of his mind to reap, from the circumstances of the times, the greatest possible degree of benefit for his native city. As he pondered over it, the old aspirations of his soul revived. Not only Ghent, he thought, might be benefited, not only Ghent might be freed, but the whole of Flanders might acquire a degree of liberty she had never known. Still, as he reflected, the image thus presented to his mind increased, and, like the cloud of smoke in the Eastern fable, which, rolling forth from the mouth of the small vase, gradually condensed into the form of an enormous giant, the thoughts which at first had referred alone to his personal safety enlarged in object, and grew defined in purpose.

The whole Continent at that time groaned under the oppression of the feudal system, decayed, corrupted, and abused; and as Albert Maurice mused, he fancied that the freedom of Ghent and Flanders once established, might afford an example to France, to Europe, to the world. The trampled serf, the enchained bondsman, the oppressed citizen, might throw off the weary yoke under which they had laboured for ages: the rights of every human being might become generally recognised over the whole surface of the globe; and broken chains and acclamations of joy, the song of freedom and the shout of triumph, presented themselves in hurried visions to his imagination, while

patriotism still represented a liberated world hailing his native land as the champion of the liberty of earth.

Such thoughts rendered him silent and abstracted; and as every one else felt a degree of painful restraint, the various guests of Martin Fruse, after lingering some time, rose to return to their dwellings. Although it was now night, several of them, before they set foot within their own homes, called upon different neighbours in their way, just to tell them, as they said, that Master Albert Maurice had returned to Ghent. None knew why; but yet this information seemed a piece of important news to all. By the sway which great natural genius and energy insensibly acquire over the minds of men, Albert Maurice, without ever attempting to force himself into prominent situations, without effort or exertions of any kind, had taught the whole people of the city of Ghent to look to him for extraordinary actions; and thus each man who heard of his arrival, generally stole forth to tell it to his next door neighbour, who again repeated it to a third. The gossip and the newsmonger gave it forth liberally to others like themselves; so that by a very early hour the next morning the return of Albert Maurice, with a variety of falsehoods and absurdities grafted thereon by the imaginations of the retailers, was generally known, not only to those who were personally acquainted with him, but to a number of others who had never seen him in their lives.

CHAPTER XII.

The appetite for news is like the appetite for every other thing, stimulated by a small portion of food; and the various unsatisfactory reports which had reached Ghent during the day, made her good citizens devour the tidings of Albert Maurice's return with no small greediness.

In the meanwhile, the young merchant communicated to his uncle, immediately after the departure of the guests, that, from various circumstances, of which he would inform him more fully at another time, he judged it not expedient to return to his own house, perhaps, for some days. He prayed him, therefore, to

allow him to occupy, for a short space, the apartments which had been appropriated to him during his youth, in the dwelling where he then was; to which request—as his nephew had originally taken up a separate establishment much against his wishes—Martin Fruse consented with no small joy, and proposed that the monk, who still remained, should sleep in the little grey chamber over the warehouse.

"Nay, nay," replied Father Barnabas, when he heard the proposal,—"nay, nay, dearly beloved brother Martin, no grey chamber for me; by my faith I must be betaking myself early to-morrow to my own green chamber, and in the meantime, I shall pass the night with a friend of mine in the city, in pious exercises and devout exclamations."

Whether these pious exercises and devout exclamations might not be the rapid circulation of the flagon, and many a jovial bacchanalian song, there may be some reason to doubt. At all events, Albert Maurice had a vague suspicion that it was so; and after pressing the monk to stay, as much as hospitality required, he ceased his opposition to his departure, at the same time putting a purse of twenty golden crowns into his hand.

The monk gazed for a moment upon the little leathern bag, whose weight, as it sunk into his palm, seemed to convey to him a full idea of its value; and then raising his merry grey eyes to the face of his travelling companion, he replied, "This is great nonsense, my son, quite unnecessary, I assure you; and indeed I cannot accept it, except upon one condition."

"What is that, my good father?" demanded the young burgher, supposing that the monk was about to affect some notable piece of disinterestedness.

"Merely that you will promise me, my son," replied Father Barnabas, "that in case you should ever hereafter meet with a certain friend of ours, whom some people call the Vert Gallant of Hannut, you will be as silent as the dead about ever having given a leathern purse to poor Father Barnabas, as he may well ask, what is the use of a purse to a holy brother, who vows never to have any money to put into it. Do you understand me, my son?"

"Perfectly, perfectly," replied Albert Maurice, "and promise you with all my heart never to mention it."

"So be it then," rejoined the monk, "and benedicite;—I shall take the horse and the mule out of the stable, and speed upon my way."

As soon as the monk was gone, Albert Maurice explained to his uncle, as briefly as possible, all that had occurred to him during his absence from Ghent; and the distress, agitation, and terror of the worthy burgher, at every stage of his nephew's story, were beyond all description. "Alack, and a well-a-day! my poor boy," he cried;—"alack, and a well-a-day! I thought what all these travellings would come to, sooner or later. Good Lord! good Lord! why should men travel at all! In my young days I never, if I could help it, set my foot three leagues out of Ghent; and the first time I ever was seduced to do so, I was caught by robbers in that cursed wood of Hannut, and was obliged to sleep a whole night upon the cold damp ground."

The young citizen calmed his uncle's agitation as much as possible, and then proceeded to consult with him as to the best means they could adopt, in case that Maillotin du Bac should recover from the drubbing he had received, and pursue, as he doubtless would, the purposes he had previously entertained. In some things, Martin Fruse was not deficient in shrewdness; and he instantly saw the advantages that would be gained by a personal application to the princess, if his nephew were again arrested.

"If," said he, "we still had our old laws, I should say at once, appeal to the eschevins, because, as we used to elect them ourselves, we should have had justice at least, if not favour. But now that the twenty-six, from the *Grand Bailli* down to the last secretary, are all named by the creatures of the duke, this Maillotin du Bac gets them to warrant everything he does, while the princess, who is kind and generous, will be sure to judge in your favour, especially when she sees the papers that prove you were first arrested for taking part with a woman; and her council, who have nothing to do with the prévôt, will take care not to thwart her who will one day be their mistress."

It was consequently determined, after some farther discussion, to follow the line of conduct suggested by the leader of the adventurers. Such precautions as were necessary to ensure against any of those secret proceedings, which sometimes made clean conveyance with an obnoxious person, before any of his friends were aware, were then concerted between Albert Maurice and his uncle; and the young citizen, pleading fatigue, retired to the apartments which he had occupied as a boy.

There was something in the aspect of the chamber,—the quaint

old tapestry, with the eyes of many of the figures shot through by the arrows which he used to direct against them, in the wanton sport of childhood,—the table notched with the boy's unceasing knife,—the well-remembered bed, in which had been dreamed many of the pleasant dreams of early years;—there was something in the aspect of the whole that called up the peaceful past, and contrasted itself almost painfully with the present. Setting down the lamp which he bore in his hand, Albert Maurice cast himself on a seat, and gazing round the apartment, while the thousand memories of every well known object spoke to his heart with the sweet murmuring voice of the days gone; and while all the perils and anxieties of his actual situation,—the imminent danger from which he had just escaped,—the menacing fate which still hung over his head,—and the fierce struggle in which he was likely to be engaged,—pressed for present attention, he could not help exclaiming, "Oh, boyhood! happy, happy boyhood! must thou never, never come again!"

The busy and usurping present, however, soon took full possession of his thoughts; and, casting from him all care for the individual danger which threatened himself, he applied his whole mind to consider the probable fate of his country. If the Duke of Burgundy were really dead, he saw, and had long foreseen, that great and extraordinary changes must take place. He knew that there was hardly a town throughout all Flanders, Holland, or Hainault, which was not ready to rise in arms, to recover some privilege wrested from its inhabitants,—to break some chain with which they had all been enthralled. He felt, too,—and it was a proud consciousness,—that he, and he alone throughout the whole land, was capable of wielding that mighty engine, a roused up multitude, for the great purpose to which it can only be properly applied,—the benefit and the happiness of the whole. This consciousness arose from two circumstances,—a thorough and intimate acquaintance with the general characters of the leading men in the various towns of Flanders, together with a knowledge that each was individually selfish or weak, full of wild and unfeasible schemes, or absorbed in narrow personal desires; and, in the second place, from the internal perception of immense powers of mind, strengthened and supported by great corporeal vigour and activity.

Such qualities were not, indeed, all that was required to carry mighty schemes to a successful result, especially where they

were to be founded on the consent and support of the vain and wilful multitude. But Albert Maurice had on several occasions tried his powers of persuading the crowd, and his ready eloquence had never failed to lead, to convince, to command. Indeed, till the present moment, he had felt almost fearful—surrounded, as he knew himself to be, by watchful and jealous eyes—of the immense popular influence that he was aware he could exert. But now, as he paused and considered the probable events about to take place, he felt a triumphant security in his own talents, and prepared to step forward, and secure a freer form of government, for Ghent at least, if the reins had really fallen from the hand that lately held them. His first thoughts, indeed, were all turned towards the benefit of his native country, to the immense advantages that might be obtained for her, and to that mighty thing, liberty, which was scarcely then known to the world. But it was not in human nature, that some breathing of personal ambition should not mingle with his nobler aspirations; and for a moment he dreamt of power, and rule, and sovereign sway, and of nobles trampled beneath his feet, and of kings bending to court his alliance. The shade of Van Artevelde seemed to rise from the deep past and beckon him on upon the road to greatness.

It was but for a moment, however; and when suddenly the better spirit woke him from his dream, and showed him whither he was wandering, he hid his face in his hands, with a mixed feeling of shame for having suffered himself to be betrayed into such thoughts, and an apprehension lest, in some after-part of his career, when the golden temptation was within his grasp, he should yield to the spirit that even thus early had assailed him, and be in act what he had already been in thought. The very idea of becoming so made him pause in his resolves, uncertain whether to take any part, lest he should ultimately take an evil one; and for a moment Albert Maurice, who feared no mortal man, hesitated in fear of himself.

Reflection, however, soon removed his doubts: he knew his intentions to be pure; and, calling before his mind the brightest examples of past ages, he determined to hold them up to himself as models to imitate, and to sacrifice everything to virtue. Even the very doubts that he had entertained of himself made him choose his examples from the sternest school of patriotism. He felt, perhaps, that any modern efforts must fall below the stan-

dard of that antique firmness, which, nurtured by the long habit of freedom, was with the Romans of the republic a passion as much as a principle; and, fixing his eyes upon the earlier Brutus, he resolved that if ever in after-life the temptation to wrong his country should assail him, he would use that talismanic memory to charm the evil demon away for ever.

While he thus paused and thought, the night wore on; all sounds died away in the streets of Ghent: the footsteps in his uncle's house ceased; and, after the midnight watch had gone by in its round, not a sound for some time disturbed the silence of the place. At length, about one o'clock in the morning, he heard a step ascending the stairs which led to his apartment, and the moment after a tap upon the door announced that some one demanded admittance. He instantly rose, threw back the tapestry, and opened the door, when, to his surprise, be beheld the small keen features and sharp black eyes of the druggist Ganay, beside the face of one of his uncle's servants.

The sight, indeed, accorded very well with his thoughts and wishes; for though the person who thus visited him was, in character and mind, as distinct—perhaps, I should say, as opposite, to himself as possible, yet he was one of those men who, in moments of general excitement, are often serviceable in the highest degree, and must be used for good, lest they should employ their talents for evil.

The little druggist had, in all his motions, a silent rapidity, a quick, sharp, but stealthy sort of activity, which, to those close observers of the human race, who pretend to read in the habitual movements and peculiar customs of the body the character of the mind within, might have spoken of dark and cunning designs, prompted by strong but carefully hidden passions, with little scruple as to the means of accomplishing schemes once undertaken. Before Albert Maurice was well aware of his presence, he was in the room beside him; and in a few brief words, spoken in a low but remarkably distinct voice, he informed the young citizen that when he went away about two hours before, he had requested the servant to wait and let him in, after the rest of the family had gone to rest. Then, adding that he had business of much importance to speak upon, he at once explained and apologised for his intrusion.

Albert Maurice took his excuses in good part; and, bidding the servant retire to rest, he closed the door and seated himself

with his visiter, well aware that he had to encounter a mind as keen and penetrating, though far less powerful, than his own, on subjects difficult and dangerous to discuss.

"Master Albert Maurice," said Ganay, when they were alone, and the retreating step of the servant had announced to his cautious ear that his words were not likely to be overheard, "it were in vain for you or I to attempt to conceal from each other, or from ourselves, that the moment is come when extraordinary changes must take place in our native land, or opportunities be lost which may never return. To you, then, I come," he added, speaking with a serious earnestness, which was intended to give the appearance of sincere conviction to the flattery he was about to administer—flattery which, as he knew it to be based in truth, he calculated upon being readily received, and producing a particular purpose of his own,—"to you, then, I come, Master Albert Maurice, as to the man calculated, by nature and by circumstances, to take the most prominent part in the actions in which we are about to be engaged,—to whom the eyes of all the citizens are naturally turned, and on whom the welfare of our country must, in a great measure, depend. My object is, in no degree, to pry into your confidence, to obtrude advice upon you, or to hurry you forward faster than you may think it necessary to proceed, but simply for the purpose of offering you any assistance in my small power to give, and of pointing out to you the necessity of thought and consultation in regard to the measures to be pursued."

The young citizen paused for a moment or two in meditation ere he replied. "My good friend," he answered, at length, "much consideration is, indeed, as you say, necessary. In the first place, we are by no means certain that our noble lord the duke is dead. If he be living, it will be our duty, as good subjects and good citizens, to give him all the aid in our power to repel his enemies and to recover his losses."

The druggist bit his lip, and Albert Maurice continued:—"If, indeed, he unhappily have fallen in this rash attempt against the Swiss, say what would you have us do?"

"Nay, nay, speak you," replied the druggist; "for well do we all feel that it is you must lead, and we must follow."

"I see but one thing that can be done," replied the young citizen,—"humbly to tender our allegiance and our services

to the heiress of the Burgundian coronet, and to petition her to confirm to us our liberties and privileges."

He spoke slowly and calmly, in a tone of voice from which nothing could be gathered in addition to the words he uttered; and in vain did the small dark eyes of his fellow-citizen scan his countenance to discover something more. His face remained completely unmoved, if it was not by a scarcely perceptible smile at the evident anxiety and agitation with which his calmness and indifference affected his companion.

"Good Heaven!" cried the druggist, starting up in the first impatience of disappointed expectation,—"Good Heaven! little did I expect to hear such words from your lips!—But no!" he added, after a moment's pause of deep thought, during which he rapidly combined every remembered trait in the character of Albert Maurice, with his present affected calmness, and deduced from it a true conclusion in regard to his real motives. "But no! Young man, I have marked you from your childhood. I know you as well as my own son, nay, better;—for his light follies have made him an alien to my house, though not to my heart—I have seen your character develop itself—I have seen the wild spirit and petulance of boyhood become, when brought under the sway of maturer reason, that overwhelming enthusiasm, which, like a mighty river, is calm only because it is deep and powerful. Albert Maurice, you cannot deceive *me;* and let me tell you, that even were the course, which but now you proposed to pursue, that to which your feelings and your reason really led you, the people of this country would leave you to truckle to power alone; and, though—wanting one great directing mind to curb their passions, and point their endeavours to a just conclusion—they might cast one half of Europe into anarchy, and rush upon their own destruction, most assuredly they would do so, rather than submit again to a new despot, or place their lives and their happiness in the power of one who owns no law, no justice but his own will."

"Think you they would do so, indeed?" demanded the young citizen, well aware of the fact, but somewhat doubtful still of the entire purity of his companion's motives.—"Then, my good friend, we must, as you say, for the safety and security of all, find some one who may lead them to better things: but to succeed we must be cautious—we must trust no man before we try him; and we must first make sure of those who lead, before we rouse

up those who are to be led. Ere one step is taken, too, we must ensure the ground that we stand upon, and know what has been the real event of this great battle. Nay, nay, protest not that it is as we have heard. Rumour, the universal liar, sometimes will give us portions of the truth, beyond all doubt; but never yet, believe me, did she tell a tale that was not more than one half falsehood. But even granting that the chief point be true, at the very threshold of our enterprise, we must learn each particular shade of thought and of opinion, possessed by our great and leading citizens. Nor must Ghent stand alone; each other city throughout all Flanders must be prepared to acknowledge and support the deeds of Ghent."

"You seem to have considered the matter deeply," said the druggist, with a smile; "but I fear such long preparations, and the time necessary to excite the public mind ——"

"Fear not," interrupted Albert Maurice; "fear not. You little know the commons, if you suppose that time is necessary to call them into action. A few shrewd words, false or true, it matters not, will set the whole country in a flame as fast as news can fly. Give me but just cause, a good occasion, and an opportunity of speech, and in one half hour all Ghent shall be in arms."

"It may be so," replied the druggist, thoughtfully; "I doubt it not—indeed I know it is so; but, methinks, my dear young friend, that while we are proceeding with such slow circumspection, our enemies may take their measures of precaution also; and as they have the present power, may use and extend it to such good effect that all our efforts will be fruitless. Already the Lord of Imbercourt has returned with a hundred and fifty lances; the number of nobles in the town, with their retainers, will furnish near five hundred more."

"Again, fear not," replied Albert Maurice: "the popular mind is as a magazine of that black hellish compound, which gives roar and lightning to the cannon; one single spark, applied by a fearless hand, will make it all explode at once. The nobles stand upon a mine; and there are those in Ghent who will not fear to spring it beneath their feet should there be need—which Heaven avert. One thing, however, must be done, and that with speed. As an united body, these feudal tyrants are powerful,—too much so, indeed,—but amongst them there must be surely more than sufficient stores of vanity, wrath, hatred, re-

venge, and all those other manifold weaknesses, which skilfully employed may detach some of their members from their own body, and spread division amongst them.—Is there no one could be won?"

"None that I know of," replied the druggist, "except, indeed, it were my very good lord and kind patron"—he spoke with a sneer—"Thibalt of Neufchâtel, who now affects mighty popularity, bows his grey head to the people as low as to his saddle-bow—calls them the good commons—the worthy citizens of Ghent; and, no longer gone than yesterday, made me, Walter Ganay, the poor burgher druggist, sit down at his lordly table, and drink of his spiced wine. But I fear me, my dear young friend, though the worthy lord may affect wonderful popularity, and others of his rank might be brought to do the same, they would never stand by us in the moment of need: the interest of their class would soon resume its place in their thoughts, and they would quit the citizens whenever the citizens wanted their help."

"That matters little," replied Albert Maurice, laying his hand upon the arm of his companion. "The aid that we might derive from the swords of half-a-dozen nobles were but dust in the balance; but the advantages that we may derive from their seeming to be with us in the outset, are great and incalculable. That which has overthrown the finest armies that were ever yet brought into the field;—that which has scattered to the wind the noblest associations that ever were framed for the benefit of mankind;—that which has destroyed leagues, and broken alliances, crushed republics under the feet of despots, and blasted the best formed and brightest designs of human beings—doubt, suspicion of each other;—that, that great marrer of all men's combinations, must be listed on our side against our oppressors. We must teach them to fear and to suspect each other; and the bonds that hold them together will be broken, and may remain severed till it is too late to unite them again. This Thibalt of Neufchâtel," he added, hastily, "I have heard of him, and seen him often. When I was a mere boy, I remember riding under his escort from the forest of Hannut, and as haughty a lord he was as e'er I met with; but now, it would seem, he has changed his tone, and is the popular, the pleasant noble, the friend of the commons;—he is somewhat in his dotage too, just at that point where weakness affects great wisdom. He must be

won, by all means, if it be but for a day. Is there no way, think you, by which he may be brought to show himself amongst us at some popular meeting. A thousand to one the very fact of his having done so, and the scorn that it will call upon him from his fellow-nobles, by committing his vanity on our side, will bind him to us for ever; and he will calmly look upon the fall of his order, if it were but for the purpose of saying to each ruined baron, 'If you had done as I have, you would have been safe.'—At all events," he added, "his presence with us would sow the first seed of disunion among the proud nobility:—can no means be found?"

"Oh, many, many, doubtless," replied the druggist; "but great reverence and respect must be shown to him, and all ultimate views must be concealed."

"Of course," answered Albert Maurice, "of course," and resting his brow upon his hands, he remained in thought for several minutes. "Mark me, good Master Ganay," he said, at length,—"mark me, and remember that you have sought me in this business, not I you. Think not, therefore, that in giving you directions what to do, I wish to arrogate to myself any superior power, or wisdom, or knowledge. Deeply and fervently do I wish to serve my country. As far as I see my way clearly, and as far as my countrymen choose to trust me, willingly will I take a lead in their affairs. The moment my own view or their confidence fails, I will draw back and leave the staff in better hands. Let your first step, then be—at an early hour to-morrow—to prompt as many of the principal citizens as you can meet with, to assemble in the town-hall upon various pretences. Speak to one about changes in the price of grain, and send him thither to hear more. Tell another that the English wools have failed, and let him come for news from across the seas. Bid a third to the town-hall for tidings from France; and a fourth for the news from Switzerland. I, too, will be there; and if you can so arrange it as to bring Thibalt of Neufchâtel to the same place by half-past ten of the clock, I will have all prepared to fix him ours, if possible."

"I will undertake it," replied the druggist. "Albert Maurice, we understand each other, though little has been said,—and perhaps wisely;—yet we understand each other, and shall do so, without farther explanations; I give you good night."

"Farewell," said Albert Maurice, as the other rose to depart;

"but remember, above all things, no word to any one of this night's meeting; for, if we would work well together for the benefit of all, we must not be seen together too much. Again, farewell."

Thus saying, he raised the light, and, after guiding his visiter through some of the long and tortuous passages of his uncle's dwelling, he saw him depart, and closed the door for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

Once more within the solitude of his own chamber, Albert Maurice cast himself into a seat; and a degree of emotion not to be mastered, passed over him, as he felt that he had taken the first step in a career which must speedily bring power, and honour, and immortal glory—or the grave. As I have before said, in all the mutinous movements of the citizens of Ghent, he had recoiled from any participation in their struggles, both with a degree of contempt for such petty broils as they usually were, and with an involuntary feeling of awe, as if he knew that whenever he did take a part in the strife, it was destined to become more deadly and more general than it had ever been before. There was nothing, indeed, of personal apprehension in his sensations. They consisted alone of a deep, overpowering feeling of the mighty, tremendous importance of the events likely to ensue, of the awful responsibility incurred, of the fearful account to be given by him, who takes upon himself the dangerous task of stirring up a nation, and attempts to rouse and rule the whirlwind passions of a fierce and excited people.

He had now, however, made the first step; and he felt that that first step was irretrievable, that his bark was launched upon the stormy ocean of political intrigue, that he had left the calm shore of private station never to behold it again; and that nothing remained for him but to sail out the voyage he had undertaken amidst all the tempests and the hurricanes that might attend his course. It could scarcely be called a weakness to yield one short unseen moment to emotion under such feelings; to look back with lingering regret upon the calm days behind; and to

strive with anxious thought to snatch some part of the mighty secrets of the future from beyond the dark, mysterious veil which God, in his great mercy, has cast over the gloomy sanctuary of fate. It was but for a moment that he thus yielded; and then, with a power which some men of vast minds possess, he cast from him the load of thought, prepared, when the moment of action came, to act decisively; and feeling that his corporeal frame required repose, he stretched himself upon his bed, and slept without a dream—a sleep as deep, as still, as calm, as we may suppose to have visited the tent of Cæsar, when, conscious of coming empire, he had passed the Rubicon.

It lasted not long, however; and the first rays of the morning sun, as they found their way through the narrow lattice of his chamber, woke him with energies refreshed, and with a mind prepared for whatever fortunes the day might bring.

A few hours passed in writing, and a short explanation with his uncle in regard to the exigencies of the approaching moment, consumed the time between the young burgher's rising and the hour appointed for the meeting in the town-hall; and, accompanied by worthy Martin Fruse, whom he well knew that he could rule as he pleased, Albert Maurice proceeded into the streets of Ghent.

In deference to his uncle's dislike to the elevation of a horse's back, the young citizen took his way on foot, followed, as well as preceded, by two serving men, to which the station of Martin Fruse, as syndic of the cloth-workers, gave him a right, without the imputation of ostentation. It was not, indeed, the custom of either of the two citizens to show themselves in the streets of their own town thus accompanied, except upon occasions of municipal state; but, in the present instance, both were aware that, if the news of the preceding day were true, sudden aid from persons on whom they could rely, either as combatants or messengers, might be required.

It was a market-day in the city of Ghent; and as they walked on, many a peasant, laden with rural merchandise, was passed by them in the streets, and many a group of gossiping men and women, blocking up the passage of the narrow ways, was disturbed by the important zeal of the serving men making way for the two high citizens whom they preceded. The streets, indeed, were all flutter and gaiety; but the market-place itself offered a still more lively scene, being filled to

overflowing with the population of the town and the neighbouring districts, in all the gay and glittering colours of their holiday costume.

Although the market had already begun, the principal traffic which seemed to be going on was that in news; and the buzz of many voices, all speaking together, announced how many were eager to tell as well as to hear. No sooner had the two citizens entered that flat, open square, which every one knows as the chief market-place of old Ghent, than the tall, graceful figure of the younger burgher caught the eyes of the people around; and in answer to a question from some one near, an artisan, who had come thither either to buy or sell, replied aloud, "It is Master Albert Maurice, the great merchant, just returned, they say, from Namur."

The words were immediately taken up by another near; and the announcement of the popular citizen's presence ran like lightning through the crowd. A whispering hum, and a movement of all the people, as he advanced, some to make way, and some to catch a sight of him, was all that took place at first. But soon his name was given out louder and more loud as it passed from mouth to mouth; and at length some one in the middle of the market-place threw up his cap into the air, and in a moment the whole buildings round echoed with "Long live Albert Maurice, the good friend of the people of Ghent!"

Doffing his bonnet, the young citizen advanced upon his way towards the town-hall, bowing on every side to the populace, with that bland yet somewhat stately smile upon his fine arching lip, which wins much love without losing a tittle of respect; and still the people as he went cheered him with many voices, while every now and then some individuals from amongst them would salute him in various modes, according to their rank and situation.

"Give thee good day, Master Albert Maurice!" cried one who claimed some acquaintance with him.—"God bless thee for a noble citizen!" exclaimed another.—"Long life to Albert Maurice!" shouted a third.—"What news from Namur?" demanded a fourth.—"Speak to us, noble sir!" again exclaimed another: "speak to us! speak to us! as you one day did on the bridge!"

Such cries were multiplying; and popular excitement, which is very easily changed into popular tumult, was proceeding to a

higher point than Albert Maurice wished, especially as amongst the crowd he observed several soldiers. These, though a word would have rendered them the objects of the people's fury, were, he thought, very likely to become the reporters of the public feeling to the government, before the preparations which he contemplated were mature; and he was accordingly hurrying his pace to avoid disturbance, when suddenly the sound of trumpets from the opposite side of the square diverted the attention of all parties.

The young citizen turned his eyes thitherward with the rest, and made his way forward in that direction, as soon as he perceived a dense but small body of armed horsemen debouching from the street that led from the palace, with clarions sounding before them and raised lances, as if their errand were as peaceful as their garb was warlike.

Apprehensive that something might occur which would require that rapid decision and presence of mind which rule, in many cases, even the great ruler—Circumstance, he hurried on, while the people made way for him to pass; probably from a tacit conviction that he alone, of all the assemblage, was qualified to deal with important events. As he approached, the body of horsemen reached the little fountain in the middle of the market-place, and he caught the flutter of female habiliments in the midst of the guard.

At that moment the squadron opened, and, clearing a small space around, displayed a brilliant group in the centre, on which all eyes were instantly turned. A number of the personages of which it was composed were well known, at least by sight, to the young burgher; and, from their presence, he easily divined the names and characters of the rest. Mounted on a splendid black charger, there appeared, amongst others, the Lord of Ravestein, first cousin of the Duke of Burgundy, together with the Duke of Clèves and the Lord of Imbercourt. The faces of these noblemen, as well as that of Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, Albert Maurice knew full well; but in the midst of all was a countenance he had never beheld before. It was that of a fair, beautiful girl, of about twenty years of age, whose sweet hazel eyes, filled with mild and pensive light, and curtained by long dark lashes, expressed—if ever eyes were the mind's heralds—a heart, a soul, subdued by its own powers, full of deep feelings, calmed, but not lessened, by its own command over itself. All

the other features were in harmony with those eyes, beautiful in themselves, but still more beautiful by the expression which they combined to produce; and the form, also, to which they belonged, instinct with grace and beauty, seemed framed by nature in her happiest mood to correspond with that fair face.

Albert Maurice needed not to be told that there was Mary of Burgundy. He gazed on her without surprise; for he had ever heard that she was most beautiful; but, as he gazed, by an instinctive reverence for the loveliness he saw, he took his bonnet from his head; and, all the crowd following his example, stood bareheaded before her, while a short proclamation was read twice by a herald.

"Mary of Burgundy," it ran, "Governess of Flanders on behalf of her father, Charles Duke of Burgundy, to her dearly beloved citizens of Ghent. It having been industriously circulated by some persons, enemies to the state, that the high and mighty prince our father Charles as aforesaid, Duke of Burgundy, and Count of Flanders, Artois, and Hainault, has been slain in Switzerland, which God forefend! and knowing both the zeal and love of the good citizens of Ghent towards our father, and how much pain such evil tidings would occasion them, we hasten to assure them that such a rumour is entirely false and malicious; and that the duke our father is well in health and stout in the field, as is vouched by letters received last night by special couriers from his camp; and God and St. Andrew hold him well for ever! "Mary."

A loud cheer rose from all the people, while, bending her graceful head, and smiling sweetly on the crowd, the heiress of Burgundy acknowledged the shout, as if it had been given in sincere congratulation on her father's safety. The princess and her attendants then rode on, to witness the same proclamation in another place; but Albert Maurice stood gazing upon the fair sight as it passed away from his eyes, feeling that beauty and sweetness, such as he there beheld, had claims to rule, far different from those of mere iron-handed power. He was wakened from his reverie, however, by some one pulling him by the cloak; and, turning round, he beheld the little druggist Ganay, who, with an expression of as much bitter disappointment, anger, and surprise, as habitual command over his features would allow them to assume, looked up in the face of Albert Maurice, demanding, "What is to be done now?"

"Where is the Lord of Neufchâtel?" rejoined the young citizen, without directly answering.

"Thank God, not yet arrived!" replied the druggist. "Shall I go and stay him from coming?"

"No!" answered Albert Maurice, thoughtfully. "No, let him come; it were better that he should.—Now, fair uncle," he continued, speaking to Martin Fruse, who had followed him through the crowd, and still stood beside him where the multitude had left them almost alone,—"now fair uncle, let us to the town-hall, whither Master Ganay will accompany us. You, who are good speakers, had better propose an address of the city in answer to the proclamation just made; and the good Lord of Neufchâtel, who will be present, will doubtless look on and answer for your loyal dispositions. For my part, I shall keep silence."

He spoke these words aloud, but with a peculiar emphasis, which easily conveyed to the mind of the druggist his conviction that the farther prosecution of their purposes must be delayed for the time; and as they proceeded towards the town-hall, Albert Maurice, by a few brief words, which good Martin Fruse neither clearly understood nor sought to understand, explained to the other the necessity of keeping the Lord of Neufchâtel attached to their party.

Albert Maurice then fell into silence which was deep and somewhat painful; and yet, strange to say, the news that he had heard of the Duke of Burgundy's safety, and the turn that the affairs had taken, was far from a disappointment to him—it was a relief. The very sight of the princess had made him thoughtful. To behold so fair, and seemingly so gentle a creature, and to know that, as he stood there before her, he bore within his own bosom the design, the resolve—however noble might be his motives, however great the object he proposed—of breaking the sceptre which was to descend to her, and of tearing from her hand the power she held from her mighty ancestors, produced feelings anything but sweet. Thence, too, thought ran on; and he asked himself, why was her reign the one to be marked out for overthrowing the ancient rule of her fathers? and he was forced to acknowledge, that it was because she was weak, and young, a woman, and an orphan—and that was no very elevating reflection. Still farther, as he once more passed across the whole extent of the market-place, when the princess had just left it,

he found all the busy tongues which had been lately vociferating his name, now so occupied with the fresh topic, that he walked on almost without notice; and contempt for that evanescent thing, popular applause, did not tend to raise his spirits to a higher pitch.

He entered the town-hall, then, gloomy; and, though all the great traders present united to congratulate him on his safe return to Ghent, he remained thoughtful and sad, and could only throw off the reserve which had fallen upon him, when the arrival of the Lord of Neufchâtel gave him a strong motive for exertion.

The other persons present received the noble baron, who condescended to visit their town-hall, with a degree of embarrassment which, though not perhaps unpleasing to him, from the latent reverence that it seemed to evince, was, at least, inconvenient. But Albert Maurice, on the contrary, with calm confidence in his own powers, and the innate dignity which that confidence bestows, met the nobleman with ease equal to his own, though without the slightest abatement of that formal respect, and all those terms of courteous ceremony, to which his station gave him a title, and which the young citizen was anxious to yield. This mixture of graceful ease with profound reverence of demeanour, delighted not a little the old seneschal of Burgundy; and when, after a time, an address was proposed and discussed in his presence, and his opinions were listened to and received with universal approbation, the sense of conscious superiority, satisfied pride, and gratified vanity, taught the worthy old lord to regard the good citizens of Ghent with feelings of pleasure and affection, very different from those he had once entertained.

It so luckily happened, also, that on this, the first occasion of his mingling amongst the citizens, their proceedings were of such a character as could not, in the least, compromise him with his fellow nobles. The matter discussed was merely a congratulatory address to the princess, in answer to her proclamation, setting forth nothing but loyalty and obedience, and carefully avoiding the slightest allusion to all topics of complaint and discontent. The little druggist Ganay spoke at length upon the subject; and, piquing himself rather than otherwise upon a degree of hypocritical art, he launched forth into high and extraordinary expressions of joy on the good tidings that the princess

had been pleased to communicate, assured her of the loyalty and devotion of the good people of Ghent, and even ventured upon a high and laudatory picture of her father's character.

Albert Maurice stood by in silence; and, though the druggist so far mistook his character as to imagine that the young citizen might admire the skill and dexterity with which he changed the purpose of their meeting, such was far from the case. While Albert Maurice listened, and suffered the other to proceed in a task with which he did not choose to meddle himself, his feelings were those of deep contempt, and he silently marked all the words and actions of the other, in order to read every trait of his character, and to acquire a complete insight into the workings of his dark and designing mind, which might be useful to him in the events which were still to come. Nor was the druggist alone the subject of his observation. Always a keen inquisitor of the human heart, Albert Maurice now watched more particularly than ever the conduct of the different influential citizens, as persons with whom he might at an after-period have to act in circumstances of difficulty; but it was upon Ganay that his attention was principally fixed, both from a feeling that he should have to use him as a tool, or oppose him as an enemy, if ever those events occurred which he anticipated; and also from a belief that the other, in striving to hurry him forward, had some deep personal motive at the bottom of his heart.

During the whole course of the discussion, the young citizen spoke but a few words, the tendency of which was, to add to the congratulation of the citizens, addressed to the Princess Mary, the petition that she would be the guardian and protectress of the liberties and privileges of the citizens of Ghent. While he was in the very act of speaking, there came a clanging sound, as if of a number of steps on the grand staircase, and, the moment after, an armed head appeared above the rest; a second followed, and then a number more; and it became very evident that a considerable band of soldiers were intruding themselves into a place, sacred by immemorial usage from their presence. The citizens drew back as the troopers forced their way on, and gradually, with many expressions of surprise and indignation, gathered round the spot where Albert Maurice had been speaking.

With the young burgher himself, indignation at the violation of the privileges of the city overcame every other feeling; and,

starting forward before the rest of the burghers, he faced at once, with his hand upon his sword, the inferior officer who was leading forward the men-at-arms, exclaiming, "Back, back, upon your life!" in a voice that made the vaulted roof of the building echo with its stern, determined tones.

The officer did, indeed, take a step back at his command; for there was a lightning in his eye at that moment which was not to be encountered rashly. "Sir," said the Lieutenant of the prévôt, for such he was, "I come here but to do my duty; and I must do it."

"And pray, sir, what duty," demanded Albert Maurice, "can afford you an excuse for violating the laws of your country and the privileges of the city of Ghent? Have you never heard by chance that this is our free town-hall, in which no soldier but a member of the burgher guard has a right to set his foot?"

"I come, sir," replied the man, "not so much as a soldier as an officer of justice, in order to arrest you yourself, Albert Maurice, charged with high treason, and to lodge you as a prisoner in the castle, till such time as you can be brought to trial for your offences."

Albert Maurice deliberately unsheathed his sword; a weapon which at that time the citizens of many of the great towns of Flanders and Brabant held it their peculiar right to wear. Others were instantly displayed around him; and at the same moment the little druggist sprang up to the window, and, putting out his head, shouted forth, "To arms, citizens of Ghent, to arms!"—which words the ears of those within might hear taken up instantly by those without; and the cry, well known in all the tumults of the city of "Sta! sta! sta!—to arms! to arms!" was heard echoing through the square below, while Albert Maurice replied slowly and deliberately to the lieutenant of the prévôt.

"Sir," he said, "whatever may be your motive for coming here, and be the charge against me just or not, you have violated one of the privileges of the city, which never shall be violated with impunity in my person. I command you instantly to withdraw your men; and, perhaps, on such condition, you may receive pardon for your offence. As far as concerns myself, I appeal from your jurisdiction, and lay my cause before the princess, to whom I am willing immediately to follow."

"That, sir, is impossible," replied the Lieutenant; "nor will

I consent to withdraw my men till I have executed the commission with which I am charged."

"Then witness every one," exclaimed Albert Maurice, "that the consequences of his own deed rest upon the head of this rash man."

The two parties within the hall—of citizens on the one hand and soldiers on the other—were very equally matched in point of numbers, though the superior discipline and arms of the prévôt's guard would, in all probability, have given them the advantage in the strife that seemed about to commence; but while each body paused, with that natural reluctance which most men feel, to strike the first blow, the multiplying shouts and cries in the square before the town-house, gave sufficient notice that an immense superiority would soon be cast upon the side of the citizens. Both Albert Maurice and the prévôt's lieutenant caught the sounds; and the former, pointing towards the open windows, exclaimed, "Listen, and be warned!"

"Do you, sir, really intend to resist the lawful authority of the duke?" demanded the other, with evident symptoms of shaken resolution and wavering courage.

"Not in the least," replied Albert Maurice, calmly but firmly; "nor do I desire to see blood flow, or tumult take place, though the cause be your own rash breach of the privileges of the city. I appeal my cause to the princess herself; and you well know, from the very name you have given to the charge against me—that of treason—that the eschevins of the city are incompetent to deal with the case."

"Nay, but the princess cannot hear your cause to-day," replied the Lieutenant of the prévôt; "for she has gone forth but now towards Alost, to publish the safety of my lord the duke. You must, therefore, surrender yourself a prisoner till she returns."

"Nay, nay," replied Albert Maurice, "not so. Here all the chief citizens of Ghent will be surety for my appearance. Into their hands I yield myself, but not into yours."

"I must have better bail than that," answered the Lieutenant, with the perturbation of his mind evidently increasing every moment as the shouts became louder without, and the noise of frequent feet in the stone vestibule below gave notice that his position was growing every instant more and more dangerous.

At that moment, however, the old Lord of Neufchatel advanced to the side of the young citizen. "Hark ye, master lieutenant,"

he said; "to end all this affray, I, Thibalt of Neufchatel, knight and noble, do pledge myself for the appearance of this young citizen, Master Albert Maurice, to answer before the princess the crime with which he is charged; and I become his bail in life and limb, lands and lordship, in all that I can become bound or forfeit, to my lord the duke: and now, sir, get you gone; for this day have you committed a gross and shameful outrage against the privileges of these good people of Ghent; and I, old Thibalt of Neufchatel, tell you so to your beard."

"Long live the Lord of Neufchatel! Long live the defender of the people of Ghent! Long live the gallant friend of the commons!" shouted a hundred voices at once, as the old noble thus far committed himself in their cause, and waved his hand for the lieutenant of the prévôt to retire.

Much would that officer now have given, to be permitted to do so, without any prospect of annoyance; but by this time, the two large entrances at the end of the hall were completely blocked up by a dense crowd of traders and artisans, armed hastily with whatever weapons they had been able to find, from partisans to weavers' beams. Beyond the doorways, again, the antechamber was completely filled by men of the same description; and from the number of voices shouting up and down the great staircase, it was clear that the whole town-house was thronged with the stirred up multitude. Those who had first reached the door had, with more moderation than might have been expected, paused in their advance, as soon as they saw the parley that was going on between the citizens and the soldiers. But when the lieutenant of the prévôt turned round to effect his retreat, they made no movement to give him way, and stood firm, with a sort of dogged determination, which the slightest word from any one present would have changed, in a moment, into actual violence. The officer paused as soon as he saw the attitude they had assumed, and eyed them with doubt not a little mingled with fear. The citizens round Albert Maurice stood silent, as if undetermined how to act; and the grim faces of the crowd, worked by many an angry passion, filled up the other side of the hall.

The resolution of Albert Maurice himself was taken in a moment; and, advancing from amongst his friends, he passed round before the prévôt's band, and approached the crowd that obstructed their passage out. "My good friends," he said,

" let me entreat of you to keep peace, and let these men depart quietly. Let us not risk our rights and privileges, and stain a just and noble cause, by any act of violence. Let them go forth in safety; and we here, your fellow-citizens, will see that no breach of our rights take place."

No one moved a step; and, for a moment or two, the leaders of the crowd remained in silence, looking alternately at each other and at the young speaker, with an expression of countenance which boded but little good to the luckless band of the prévôt. At length one gruff voice demanded, " What do they here?"

" They came with orders from their superior officer," replied Albert Maurice, " for the purpose of arresting me."

" Then they should die for their pains," replied the same rough voice, which was supported by loud cries from behind of " Down with them, down with them!"

" Nay, nay," exclaimed Albert Maurice, raising his tone, " it must not—it shall not be so. Men of Ghent, for my honour, for your own, for the safety and privileges of the town, let them pass free. If you love me," he added, in a gentler voice.

This appeal to their affection for himself was not without its effect; and, after considerable persuasions and delays, he prevailed upon them to withdraw from the antechamber and the staircase; and then, leading down the lieutenant himself, he conducted him and his men-at-arms through a lane of very ominous-looking faces in the vestibule out into the great square, which was now thronged in almost every part by bodies of the armed populace. Through the midst of these, also, though not without considerable danger, Albert Maurice obtained a free passage for the prévôt's band; nor did he leave them till he had seen them clear of all obstruction. The lieutenant had remained completely silent during their passage through the crowd, except when called upon to give some command to his men concerning their array. When, however, they were free from the people, he took the hand of the young citizen in his, and wrung it hard: " Master Albert Maurice," he said, " you have acted a noble part, and it shall be remembered when it may do you good."

" Let it be remembered, sir," replied the young citizen, " to show that the people and burghers of Ghent, while they are determined to maintain their rights with vigour, are equally

determined not to maintain them with violence. Do but justice, sir, to our motives and our conduct, and we demand no more."

As soon as he had seen the little band of soldiers placed beyond the risk of all farther opposition, he returned to the town-hall, amidst the shouts of the people, who were now lingering to talk over the events that had already occurred, and to discover whether anything fresh might not arise to give them an opportunity of exercising the arms they held in their hands, and of satisfying the spirit of tumult that had been excited amongst them. On his arrival in the hall, the young citizen instantly approached the Lord of Neufchatel, saying, "Of course I consider myself as a prisoner in your hands, my lord, till such time as I can be heard in my own defence by the princess and her council, which, I beseech you, may be as soon as you can bring it about."

"You seem to understand all these things, young gentleman," replied the old noble, "as well as if you had been born to courts. Let us now go forth, then, to my lodging, where I will entertain you as well as my poor means will admit; and will immediately send to ascertain when the princess will condescend to hear your cause."

This mode of proceeding was, of course, immediately adopted; and Albert Maurice accompanied the Lord of Neufchatel to his dwelling; where, partly as a prisoner, partly as a guest, he remained during the rest of the day, and the night that followed. The conduct of his entertainer towards him was a combination of stately hospitality and patronising superiority; and Albert Maurice himself, without abating one jot of that innate dignity and proud sense of mental greatness, which more or less affected his usual demeanour, succeeded, by showing all due reverence for the rank of his host, and expressing no small gratitude for the liberal feeling he had displayed towards him, in gaining each hour more and more upon the old officer's esteem. The whole history of his case also, as it had occurred, and the written testimony which he produced to show the cause of his arrest by Maillotin du Bac, afforded a sufficient presumption of his innocence to satisfy the old Lord of Neufchatel, who assured the young citizen of his personal protection and support before the council.

Late in the evening a messenger from the palace announced, that at noon the next day the Princess Mary would hear Albert

Maurice and his accusers; and shortly after the old lord left him for the night, bidding him amuse himself with a few books and papers which he pointed out in the chamber assigned to him, and recommending him not to think further of to-morrow, as his acquittal was certain. Albert Maurice, willingly following his advice, sat down to read; and the sun soon after set to the young citizen, leaving him in a position as different as it is possible to conceive, from that which he had contemplated the night before, as his probable situation at the end of four-and-twenty hours.

And so it is through life! Where is the cunning astrologer, or sage, or politician, who can lay out, beforehand, the scheme of a single day?

CHAPTER XIV.

During the course of the following morning, Albert Maurice was visited, in the sort of honourable imprisonment to which he was subjected, by all the chief citizens of Ghent; and a number of them begged permission of the ex-seneschal of Burgundy to accompany their young townsman to the council-table of the palace. This was immediately granted to Martin Fruse and several others, who, by relationship or connexion, could claim a near interest in the fate of Albert Maurice. At the same time the rumour of what was about to occur spread all over Ghent, and before the arrival of the appointed hour, a large crowd, composed of different classes, surrounded the great gate of the dwelling of the Lord of Neufchatel. At about half-past eleven, one of the young citizen's own horses was brought from his house to the place of his temporary abode; and, shortly after, the old nobleman rode forth, accompanied by his *protégé*, and followed by half a dozen of the principal burghers; while a party of about twenty of his own armed attendants brought up the rear of the cavalcade. In this order, and amongst deafening shouts from the people, who ran on by the sides of their horses, they proceeded to the palace, where a considerable crowd was also assembled.

In the court-yard, drawn up so as to face the great gate, was

a small body of men-at-arms clad in complete steel, with horses furnished with that sort of defensive armour called bard or bardo; while, in a double line from the entrance of the outer enclosure to the steps before the palace, appeared a strong body of harquebussiers with their slow matches lighted, as if prepared for an anticipated struggle:—behind these, again, appeared the soldiers of the prévôt's guard, who were chosen in general from those lighter and more active troops, which at a former period were called in the English armies hobblers, but which had now generally obtained the name of *jennetaires*, from the jennets or light Spanish horses on which they were usually mounted.

The Lord of Neufchatel and his companions alighted at the outer gate, and passed on foot through the formidable military array above described. The old nobleman led the way, followed by Albert Maurice, who, with a firm step and an upright carriage, but without the slightest touch of bravado in his demeanour, passed along the whole line, which, he plainly saw, was drawn up to overawe any attempt to rescue him, which the populace might be inclined to make in case of his condemnation. The same demonstrations of military force appeared in the outer hall, and in an ante-room beyond, in which the young citizen and his companions were detained for a few minutes, while his arrival was announced in the chamber of audience with which it communicated.

It were vain to say that no shade of emotion passed through the bosom of Albert Maurice as he stood there waiting for a hearing which was to determine his fate for life or death; but still his feelings were very different from those which men of less firm nerve might be supposed to experience on such an occasion. Poor Martin Fruse, who stood behind him, quivered in every limb with anxiety and apprehension; fidgeted here and there, and many a time and oft plucked his nephew by the sleeve, to receive rather than to yield consolation and encouragement. The countenance of the young burgher, however, was in no way troubled: there was in it that expression of deep grave thought, which befitted the time and circumstances; but his brow was unclouded, his cheek had lost not a tint of its natural hue, and his lip quivered not with anything like agitation.

After a brief pause, two soldiers, who stood with their partizans crossed before the entrance of the audience hall, raised their weapons at a signal from within. The doors were thrown open,

and in the midst of much hurrying and confusion—for a number of persons had by some means gained admission to the ante-chamber to witness the proceedings—Albert Maurice, and those who accompanied him, were led forward to the end of a long table, at which were seated a body of the noblest men of the land. A wooden bar had been drawn from each side of the council-board to the wall on either hand; and two soldiers with drawn swords were placed within these barriers, to prevent the spectators from advancing beyond them. The space thus left at the end of the hall, being but small, was soon filled up; and the doors were immediately closed by the orders of the Lord of Imbercourt, who was sitting near the head of the table.

In the chair of state, which occupied the principal place at the table, sat the same gentle, beautiful being whom Albert Maurice had seen the day before in the great square. She was dressed as befitted her state and station; and, in a semicircle behind her, stood a bevy of fair girls, whose beauty, however, faded completely before her own. She was somewhat paler than the day before, and perhaps a slight degree of agitation and anxiety might be visible in her looks: but still the predominant expression of her countenance was gentle calmness; and, as she raised the dark fringes of her soft hazel eyes towards the accused, when he took his place at the end of the table, they seemed to say,—"I shall be a lenient judge."

His eyes met hers for a moment, and the colour rose slightly in her cheek as they did so; while, at the same time, a thrill of feelings, new and strange, passed through the heart of Albert Maurice. The principal places of the council-table were filled by the Lords of Ravestein, Imbercourt, Hugonet, and Vere; but the Duchess of Burgundy herself, the wife of Charles the Bold, was not present.

A momentary silence succeeded the bustle of their entrance, and the Lord of Neufchâtel surrendered in due form the prisoner for whom he had become responsible, and claimed to be delivered from the charge. The business of the council then seemed suspended for a time, from some motive which Albert Maurice did not understand. This was explained, however, the minute after, when a door, which opened into the space within the bar, was thrown back, and Maillotin du Bac, his countenance as pale as ashes, his arm in a sling, and his head wrapped in innumerable bandages, was supported into the hall by two attendants. The

eye of the Princess fixed upon him with an expression of grief and compassion, and making an eager gesture with her hand, she exclaimed, "Place him a chair, place him a chair!"

This command was immediately obeyed; and after the Prévôt had paused for a few minutes to regain strength, he was directed to proceed with his charge against Albert Maurice, qualified simply as a citizen of Ghent. This he instantly did with a loudness of tone and a degree of vindictive vehemence, which no one could have supposed him capable of exerting, from the weak state in which he appeared to be. His present charge was somewhat differently couched from that which he had made against the young citizen at the castle of Hannut: he passed over in complete silence all the circumstances of the prisoner's arrest, merely stating that he had received information of a treasonable communication carried on by this young citizen, between Ghent, Namur, and France; and that he had arrested him accordingly. On his person he said he had found letters, the tendency of which placed the facts beyond doubt; and also showed that the prisoner was criminally connected with those lawless bands of *routiers* and plunderers called the Green Riders. He then went on to detail his having placed him securely in one of the strongest dungeons of the castle of Hannut, and of his having discovered the next morning that the dungeon was vacant. How it became so he said he could not tell; but certain it was that he had not been received by the Lord of Hannut with that courtesy and willing co-operation which, as an officer of the Duke of Burgundy, he had a right to expect. He next detailed to the council his pursuit of the Green Riders; and related the manner in which he had been attacked and defeated, although he rated the number of the brigands as not less than triple that of his own band. It was evidently their design, he said, and probably their whole design, to deprive him of the papers which proved the guilt of their comrade and ally, who stood there at the end of the table. In this view they had unfortunately been too successful; but he was ready to swear upon his knightly oath, and two or three of his band, to whom he had shown those papers, were prepared to bear witness, that they were of a most treasonable character.

To confirm this statement two of the troopers were accordingly called in, and swore to the prévôt having shown them the

papers found upon the prisoner's person, which were full of treason in every line.

During the evidence of one of these persons, the eye of Maillotin du Bac detected the old Lord of Neufchatel in whispering something to the prisoner; and he exclaimed loudly and indecently against that nobleman for cogging, as he called it, with a base mechanical citizen and a traitor.

"Hark ye, Sir Maillotin du Bac," replied the old lord, bursting forth with no small indignation, "you yourself are a grovelling hound; and by the Lord that lives, the first time I meet thee I will drub out of thee the little life that the good Green Riders have left thee, and more——"

"Peace, peace, sirs," interrupted the Lord of Imbercourt; "you forget the presence in which you stand, your own dignity, and the solemnity of the occasion. My Lord of Neufchatel, do you object to tell the council what you whispered but now in the ear of that young man?"

"Not I, in faith," replied the other; "that was just what I was about to tell you when you interrupted me. I was then saying that the fellow there, who has just sworn to having read so much treason, must have learned to read very fast, and somewhat late in the day; for not a year ago he was trumpeter in my train, and could not tell an A from a Z."

"Ha!" cried the Lord of Imbercourt, "this must be looked to. Some one hand him a book. Methinks thou turnest mighty pale," he added, speaking to the trooper as his command was obeyed; and a volume of the archives of Burgundy was placed in the man's hand. "There, read me that sentence!"

With trembling hands the man held the book, gazing with a white face, and lack-lustre eyes, upon the characters which it contained, and which were evidently to him meaningless enough. After a moment's vain effort to perform the impossible task, he lifted his eyes, and rolled them, full of dismay and detected guilt, round the faces of all present; while Maillotin du Bac, in rage and disappointment, set his teeth firm in his pale lip, and stamped his foot heavily upon the ground.

The brow of the Chancellor Hugonet darkened; and, pointing to the man who had so evidently committed a gross and wilful perjury, he exclaimed, "Take him away, and let him be well guarded." The command was immediately obeyed, and the trooper was hurried out of the chamber by two of the attendants.

"Do you not think, my lords," said the low, sweet voice of Mary of Burgundy, "that we may dismiss this cause? If it be supported by such witnesses as these, it will bring more disgrace upon our nation than can be well wiped off."

"We must not forget, madam," replied Imbercourt, "that here is justice to be done to the characters of two persons, the accused and his accuser; and though the nature of the testimony offered as yet may well induce us to view this charge with suspicion, yet we should be doing less than justice to this young citizen of your good town of Ghent, did we not give him the opportunity of clearing his character fully from even a shade of doubt. Sir Maillotin du Bac," he added somewhat sternly, "have you any other testimony to produce in support of your accusation?"

"Methinks," replied the Prévôt, boldly, "that my own word and testimony should be enough."

"Not here, sir," replied Imbercourt. "You, young gentleman," he added, addressing the young burgher, "you have heard the charge against you; do you desire to speak in your defence?"

"I pray thee, do so, young sir," said the Princess, bending slightly forward;—"we would fain believe you wholly innocent, for we cannot believe that our noble father, the Duke Charles, can have done anything to turn one true heart against him; and we would fain hear that such a word as treason is unknown in the good land of Flanders, except in the mouths of base calumniators, such as the man who, but now, has been taken hence."

Albert Maurice bent low his head, and then raising his eyes, he replied, —"Madam, for your good opinion I would plead long; and, that I felt conscious of my innocence, and able to establish it before you, you may, in some degree, see, by the bold appeal I have made to your justice, rather than trust myself in the hands of one whose character is not famous for equal dealing. It seldom happens, lady, that even in this evil world one man persecutes another without some motive, springing from either avarice, ambition, or revenge; and yon prévôt's bare word, perhaps, might weigh even against the fair character I trust I have hitherto borne, could I not prove, that, besides the general hate which he bears towards the citizens of Ghent, he has a cause of personal animosity against myself. The tale is soon told, and the proofs of its veracity are in my hand," he added, laying

his finger upon the papers, which he had collected to prove his innocence. "In the small town of Gembloux, whither I had gone, on business relating to the traffic of my house, I heard a woman's scream, and saw the wife of an honest burgher insulted and ill-treated at her own door by one of the brutal soldiers of that prévôt's band—a band, lady, which, by their insolent contempt of all the ordinary charities and feelings of civil life, have brought more hatred upon the rulers of Flanders than ever your noble father dreamt of, and than ever their services against the brigands can repay. But no more on that score," he continued, as the Lord of Imbercourt held up his hand with a warning gesture. "Suffice it, I saw a woman ill-treated by one of the soldiers of his band, and I struck the miscreant to the earth in the very deed; and where is there a Christian man, be he knight or noble, citizen or peasant, who shall say that I did wrong? Before I was aware, however, I was seized and overpowered by numbers, my arms tied with cords, my horse-boy beaten and driven out of the town, my baggage plundered, and several sealed letters which I was bearing from Namur to Ghent broken open, and read for the purpose of forging accusations against me."

"You hear, lords, you hear!" exclaimed Maillotin du Bac; "he acknowledges the fact of the letters, mark that."

"Ay, do mark it, noble lords! mark it well," continued Albert Maurice, boldly:—"I do acknowledge it. Nay, more, I acknowledge that in those letters was the expression of some grief and indignation felt by the people of Namur, on account of infringed rights and violated privileges. But at the same time, I do most strictly deny, that I knew one word of the contents of those letters, till they were read by yon bad man in my presence; and still more, I affirm, that even had I known everything that they contained, or had I written them myself, there was no sentence in them which tyranny itself could wrest into such a crime as treason. Lady, and you, Lords of the Council, yon prévôt has called witnesses to tell you what were the contents of those letters, and of the honour and good faith of those witnesses you have had an opportunity of judging. I will now call upon a witness also, with whose character you have equal means of being acquainted. My Lord of Imbercourt, to you I appeal. Those letters were shown to you in my presence; and if you can, upon your knightly honour, declare that they contain treason, do so before the world."

"Your appeal to me, young gentleman," replied the Lord of Imbercourt, "must not be made in vain. I do most solemnly declare, on my honour and oath as a belted knight, that in the letters shown me by the prévôt, as found upon that young citizen's person, though there were some expressions bordering upon turbulent discontent, yet there was nothing, in my poor judgment, which any sane man could construe into treason."

The eyes of Mary of Burgundy had fixed eagerly upon the counsellor as he spoke; and when he uttered the last words, a bright smile of gentle satisfaction lighted up all her features, while a slight glow, spreading over her face, seemed to tell with what anxiety she had listened to the testimony of the Lord of Imbercourt. That smile and that glow were not unmarked by Albert Maurice; and his own cheek flushed, and his own rich voice rather trembled, as he proceeded with the next sentences of his defence.

"On such grounds of accusation, lady," he continued, "was I dragged along, tied hand and foot as a criminal of the worst description,—hurried forward in this situation with the rest of the troop, while they attacked a party of *routiers* in the forest of Hannut—carried on to the castle in that forest, and thrown into a dark dungeon, with a pile of straw for my bed. I thence made my escape——"

"How?" shouted the voice of Maillotin du Bac—"how?"

"How matters not," replied Albert Maurice.

"Ay, by my faith, but it does," rejoined the Prévôt; "for I accuse you, Sir Citizen, of leaguing with these forest swine that have so long plundered and desolated the land. Every one of my men can bear witness, that for the papers concerning you alone was I attacked near Braine-la-Leud; that they were the first things sought for when we were overpowered by numbers, and that the continual cry of their leaders was,—'Secure the papers!'"

Albert Maurice paused, and the Chancellor Hugonet exclaimed—"You had better explain your escape, young gentleman; this gives a new aspect to the case."

"On the facts that followed I can say something also," observed the Lord of Imbercourt, "having been in the castle of my good brother of Hannut when the absence of the prisoner was first discovered."

"Speak, then, my lord, speak," said Mary of Burgundy,

eagerly; "such testimony as yours is beyond all question; and, unaccustomed to such scenes as this, I would fain see this case terminated speedily and well. Speak, then, my lord, and tell us all you know."

"It were better," replied Imbercourt, "and more in the forms of justice, to suffer the accused to tell his own tale, in regard to his escape; before I give any evidence that I can upon the subject. If you require it, sir," he added, addressing the young citizen, "I will absent myself from the council-table while you deliver your statement, that my testimony may be considered the more impartial."

"Not in the least, my lord," replied Albert Maurice, "do I desire your absence at all; nor is it my purpose to make any statement in regard to my escape.—Escape I did—Of course I could not have done so effectually without some aid, from without or from within; and I do not choose to injure any one, however lowly or however high, by implicating them in an affair like this. Whatever you know upon the subject must be from some other source, and, knowing my own innocence in every respect, I hear you without apprehension."

"I have then but little beyond conjecture to advance," said Imbercourt. "On the morning after our arrival at the castle of Hannut, this prévôt presented himself in great wrath before my noble brother-in-law and myself, informing us of the escape of the prisoner, and insinuated, in somewhat insolent terms, that the Lord of Hannut—as loyal a nobleman as ever lived—had abetted the evasion. An instant investigation was instituted, and we learned that the dungeon in which the prisoner was left the night before had been found locked in the morning. No sign of violence was to be seen when we examined it in person, not a bar was broken, not a stanchion was moved: there, lay the straw which had been the prisoner's bed; there, stood the flagon and the bread which had been given him for his supper on the previous night. But on inquiry, we found, that this prévôt, after some deep drinking, and, in a state, as several persons witnessed, of stupid drunkenness, had visited the prisoner's cell at a late hour the preceding night; and we concluded, that he had suffered the young burgher to slip past him unobserved before he closed the door. Whether it was so or not, none but himself can tell."

"My lord, as I before said, I will be silent on that point,"

replied Albert Maurice; "but the use which I made of my liberty would be quite sufficient, I should conceive, to prove that I had no very evil or dangerous designs. I hastened immediately to Gembloux, where I obtained these papers, which I now lay before the council, to establish fully the fact that I was arrested, in the first instance, solely for striking a soldier, who had insulted the wife of a burgher of the place; I then made all speed to Ghent, where I was sure of encountering my adversary, but where I trusted also to obtain justice."

"And the first thing you did when you were in Ghent," exclaimed Maillotin du Bac, with the angry vehemence of disappointed hatred, "was to stir up the people to tumult, to make seditious speeches in the town-hall, to resist the lawful force sent to arrest you, and to incite the people to murder the officers that were despatched for your apprehension—Pretty proofs of innocence, indeed! Well, well, the princess and the lords of the council will see what will come of it, if they suffer such doings to take place with impunity. Who will serve the state, if the state will not support them in doing their duty? The strong hand, lords, the strong hand is the only way to keep down these turbulent, disaffected burghers."

"It must be the strong hand of justice, then, Prévôt," replied Imbercourt; "and let me tell you, that you yourself, by the unjust arrest of this young man, have done more to stir up the people to rebellion than the most seditious traitor that ever harangued from a market cross. Nor, sir, must you scatter such false and malicious accusations without proofs. Before I sat down here, I, with several of the other lords now present, investigated accurately what had been the conduct of this young burgher during the course of yesterday morning; and I find that, so far from his behaviour being turbulent and seditious, he acted only as a loyal subject to our lord the duke, and was one of those good merchants who drew up an address of congratulation on the news of our sovereign's safety. More—I found that, had it not been for his influence and strong exertions with the people, your lieutenant and his band, Sir Prévôt, would have been sacrificed to their indignation, for imprudently intruding into a privileged place, while the merchants of the good town were assembled in deliberation. Nor can any one doubt the fact, for your own lieutenant was the first to bear witness to this young citizen's generous intercession in his favour."

Maillotin du Bac set his teeth hard, and stretched out his hand upon his knee, with a sort of suppressed groan, which might proceed either from the pain of his bruises, or the disappointment of his malice. After a short pause, during which no one seemed prepared to say anything more, either in accusation or defence, the Princess herself spoke, with that sort of timid and doubtful tone which was natural in one so young, so inexperienced, and so gentle on giving a decision upon so important a cause, although it was sufficiently evident to all what her decision must be.

"I think, my lords," she said, "after what we have heard there cannot be any great difference of opinion. The evidence which has been brought forward seems not only to exculpate this young gentleman from all charge whatever, but to cast the highest honour upon his character and conduct. What say you, my lords? do you not acquit him freely from all stain?"

The voices of the council were found unanimous in favour of the accused; and it was announced to him that he stood free and clear from all accusation. The princess bowed to him, as his full acquittal was declared, with a smile of gratification at the result, which sprang from a pure, a noble, and a gentle heart, pleased to see a fellow creature, whose dignified deportment and graceful carriage could not but win upon the weaknesses of human nature, establish clearly a higher and more dignified title to esteem by tried virtue and integrity. There was no other feeling mingled with her smile; nor did Albert Maurice, for a moment, dream that there was; but, at the same time, it wakened a train of thoughts in his own mind both dangerous and painful. More than ever did he feel that he was born out of the station for which nature had formed his spirit; and more than ever did his heart burn to do away those grades in society, which, though the inevitable consequences of the innate differences between different men, he, from mortified pride, termed, artificial distinctions, and unjust barriers betwixt man and man. It were to inquire too curiously, perhaps, to investigate how the one sweet smile of that beautiful lip woke in the heart of the young citizen a train of such apparently abstruse thoughts. So, however, it was; and, as the doors of the audience hall were thrown open behind him, allowing those to go forth who had gained admittance to hear his examination before the council, he bowed to the princess and the nobles present, with

feelings individually more friendly to all of them, but certainly more hostile to the general system of government, and the existing institutions of society.

Still Albert Maurice entertained no presumptuous dreams in regard to Mary of Burgundy. He thought her certainly the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld. She had smiled upon him sweetly and gently. She had been present at his examination herself, though she might, notwithstanding his appeal, have left it to the decision of her council. She had done him full and impartial justice; and she had seemed to derive a personal pleasure from his acquittal. All this he felt strongly; and he was fond to picture, from that fair face, and those soft hazel eyes, a mind and a spirit within all gentleness and excellence. He thought, too, that had mankind been in its just and natural situation, where no cold rules placed as wide a distance between different classes, as if they were composed of different creatures, he might have striven to win — ay, and he thought he might have won, that fair hand, which had held the scales of justice for him so impartially.

Such feelings, and all the many collateral thoughts to which those feelings gave rise, were busy in his breast, as he followed the good old Lord of Neufchâtel towards the door. Just as he was going out, he turned to take one more glance of the princess,—the last, perhaps, he was ever to obtain; but Mary of Burgundy, and her ladies, had already quitted the hall, as well as his accuser, Maillotin du Bac, who had hastened away to conceal himself from popular indignation. Nothing was to be seen but one or two of the members of the council, standing together in a group at the farther end of the table, and apparently, by the gay laughter in which they were indulging, conversing over some indifferent subject. Albert Maurice turned, and strode through the antechamber, while the Lord of Neufchâtel walked on before him, demonstrating, with proud courtesy, various points of feudal law to good Martin Fruse, who listened to his speech with every mark of the most deferential respect. The young citizen was just entering the outer hall, and he already heard the shouts of the people in the square, welcoming with a glad voice, the news of his acquittal, which had preceded his own appearance, when somebody plucked him by the sleeve, and one of the officers of the household informed him, in a low tone, that the Princess Mary required his presence for a moment in private.

The heart of the young burgher beat quick; but without pause he followed the attendant, as he turned away from him, and in a moment had passed through one of the side doors into the private apartments of the palace.

CHAPTER XV.

Every one knows that, in the early dawn of a Sicilian morning, the shepherds and the watchers on the coast of the Messinese Strait will sometimes behold, in the midst of the clear unclouded blue of the sky, a splendid but delusive pageant, which is seen also, though in a less vivid form, amongst the Hebrides. Towers and castles, domes and palaces, festivals and processions, arrayed armies and contending hosts, pass, for a few minutes, in brilliant confusion before the eyes of the beholders, and then fade away, as if the scenes of another world were, for some especial purpose, conjured up during one brief moment, and then withdrawn for ever from their sight.

Thus there are times, too, in the life of man, when the spirit, excited by some great and stirring passion, or by mingling with mighty and portentous events, seems to gain for a brief instant a confused but magnificent view of splendid things not yet in being. Imagination in the one case, and her daughter, Hope, in the other, give form and distinctness to the airy images, though both are too soon doomed to fade away amidst the colder realities of the stern world we dwell in.

The mind of Albert Maurice had been excited by the scenes he had just gone through; and success, without making him arrogant, had filled him full of expectation. Each step that he took forward seemed but to raise him higher, and each effort of an enemy to crush him seemed, without any exertion of his own, only to clear the way before him. Such thoughts were mingling with other feelings—brought forth by the sight, and the voice, and the smile of Mary of Burgundy, when the sudden call to her presence woke him from such dreams; but woke him only to show to his mind's eye many a confused but bright and splendid image, as gay, as glittering, as pageant-like, but as

unreal also, as the airy vision which hangs in the morning light over the Sicilian seas. Fancy at once called up everything within the wide range of possibility.—Battles and victories, and triumphant success, the shout of nations and of worlds, the sceptre, the palace, and the throne, and a thousand other indistinct ideas of mighty things, danced before his eyes for a moment, with a sweeter and a brighter image, too, as the object and end of ambition, the reward of mighty endeavour, the crowning boon of infinite success. But still he felt and knew, even while he dreamed, that it was all unreal; and, as he followed the messenger with a quick pace, the vision faded, and left him but the cold and naked truth. At length, after passing through several chambers, which flanked the hall of audience, the door of a small apartment, called the bower, was thrown open, and the young burgher stood once more before Mary of Burgundy.

One of the most painful curses of high station is that of seldom, if ever, being alone; of having no moment, except those intended for repose, in which to commune with one's own heart, without the oppression of some human eye watching the emotions of the mind as they act upon the body, and keeping sentinel over the heart's index—the face. Mary of Burgundy was not alone, though as much alone as those of her station usually are. She stood near a window, at the other side of the apartment, with her soft rounded arm and delicate hand twined in those of one of her fair attendants—Alice of Imbercourt—on whom she leaned slightly, while the Lord of Imbercourt himself stood beside her on the other hand; and, with his stately head somewhat bent, seemed, with all due reverence, to give her counsel upon some private matter of importance. Another figure was retiring from an opposite door as Albert Maurice entered; but who it was, the faint glance he caught did not permit the young burgher to distinguish.

He advanced towards the spot where the Princess stood, with the usual marks of ceremony and reverence; and, as he came near and bent one knee, she held out her hand for him to kiss, with a gentle smile, but with the air and demeanour of a princess.

"I congratulate you, Master Albert Maurice," she said, as soon as he had risen, "on the clear and satisfactory manner in which you have been enabled to establish your innocence; for I fear, it sometimes happens that persons accused are not able to bring forward sufficient evidence to exculpate them before their

princes, who, judging according to their best conscience, are often charged with cruelty or partiality, more from the defect of the testimony offered to them, than from any desire of doing aught but justice. I therefore congratulate you most sincerely on your having had the means of establishing your innocence beyond all doubt: and I am deeply gratified myself, that you have been able to remove every doubt from my own mind, as well as to satisfy my council."

"Had every person accused, so gracious and impartial a judge, madam," replied the young citizen, "it were happy for the world; and, indeed, it was my full confidence in your own justice, and in that of the noble lords of the council, which made me appeal so boldly to your own decision."

"For so doing I thank you, sir," replied the Princess; "and I have now sent for you to say so, as well as to speak with you on one part of your defence, which somewhat touched upon the honour of my father's justice. Although I marked it at the time, I did not choose to notice it before the many; and now, by the advice of one of my best and most faithful friends, I seek this private mode—certainly not of chiding you for what has passed your lips—but of calling to your remembrance things which might have made your words less bitter."

The Princess paused for a moment, colouring slightly, with some degree of agitation, from the task thus imposed upon her, and from the long time which it required her to speak upon subjects of some political importance. She showed, indeed, no awkward incompetence, no want of mental power; but her blush and her slight embarrassment were those of her youth, of her sex, and of a delicate and feeling mind. While she paused, Albert Maurice merely bowed his head, without reply; and in a moment after, she proceeded.

"I am very young, sir," she said, "and, as a woman, am of course cut off from mingling greatly with mankind. Nevertheless, as it has so unfortunately fallen out, that the rule of these territories should seem to be at some time destined for a female hand, and that hand mine, I have not, of course, neglected the study of the laws and institutions, nor of the history, of the dominions that may one day become my own. In speaking of the city of Namur, you named rights violated, and privileges infringed, and, perhaps, alluded to some other privileges of which other towns have been deprived. Most of the events that you probably

referred to, took place before the period to which my own remembrance extends; but, if the historians of the land say true, no rights were ever, in any instance, arbitrarily wrenched away from the people. In all cases, if my memory serve me right, the loss of privileges was inflicted on the citizens as a punishment for some crime, for some unprovoked revolt, for some attempt to snatch the power from what they considered a weak or embarrassed hand. Such being the case, justice—both in the abstract sense of awarding punishment for evil, or in the moral policy of deterring others from crime, by the example of retributive infliction—required that the cities which had so acted should suffer a certain penalty as the consequence. That penalty has always been the loss of some of their privileges; which punishment has uniformly been received by them as most merciful, at the time when detected treason or suppressed revolt brought upon them the wrath, and placed them at the mercy, of a powerful prince. Nor, let me say, can they hope to regain the privileges they have lost, except by a calm and tranquil obedience, or some service rendered, which may merit reward and confidence."

She waited for a reply; but Albert Maurice remained silent. In truth, he felt no small difficulty in so shaping his answer as not to swerve from the truths indelibly written in his own heart, and yet not to hurt the feelings, or lower himself in the esteem, of one whose good opinion had become, he knew not why, of more consequence in his eyes than mortal opinion had ever been before. He felt, too, that the princess spoke according to the ideas and sentiments of her rank and of her times; while he himself bore within his bosom the feelings of his own class, and the thoughts of times long gone, when liberty was eloquent and powerful.

Although between such different principles there was a gulf as deep as the abyss, still love might span it with a bridge, which, like that that leads to the Moslem paradise, is finer than a famished spider's thread. But it were wrong to say he loved. Oh, no! he would have shrunk from so idle a thought, had it come upon him in a tangible shape. Yet there was something growing upon his heart which softened it towards Mary of Burgundy—which rendered it unwilling to hurt her feelings—which made it timid of offending her, though the eye of the proudest sovereign that ever trod the earth would not have caused it to quail for an instant.

The Lord of Imbercourt saw more clearly into the character of the man, and knew more of the circumstances of the times, than the princess he had stayed to counsel; and perceiving that the young citizen was not about to reply, he spoke a few words in addition to that which Mary had advanced, taking a wider ground than she had assumed, and examining the subject more as a philosopher than either a feudal noble, or the counsellor of an absolute prince. He spoke of the necessity of order and good government, for the peace and happiness of the people themselves; he pointed out that tranquillity and general confidence were absolutely necessary to industry, both commercial and productive; and he showed, with the voice of years and experience, that turbulence and discontent were ruinous to any nation, but, in a tenfold degree, ruinous to a commercial people.

"Believe me, Master Albert Maurice," he added, "that just in the same proportion that the man is to be blest, who teaches a people to improve their moral state, to cultivate their intellects, and to extend their knowledge and resources,—in the same degree is he to be hated and despised, who teaches them to be discontented with their condition."

He paused; and Albert Maurice replied with more calm firmness than he could, perhaps, have shown, had he answered the princess,—"I will not, my lord, attempt to use towards you that ordinary fallacy which, in fact, arises only in the imperfection of language, namely, that people must be rendered discontented with their condition, in order to gain the desire of changing it. I know and feel, that, though we have not a word exactly to express it, there is an immense difference between discontent with our present state, and the calm desire of improving it. But still, it may be doubted, whether the mind of man, especially in multitudes, does not require some more universal and potent stimulus to carry it generally forward to great improvements, than the slow progress of increasing knowledge can afford."

"No, no, indeed," replied Imbercourt; "the potent stimulus is like too much wine, which only maddens for the time, and leaves every nerve more feeble and relaxed thereafter. No, no: administer good plain and wholesome food to the social as well as to the human body; and, growing in strength and performing all its functions correctly, it will gain, by the same calm and easy degrees, the desire and the power of obtaining that which is best adapted to its state."

Albert Maurice felt that there was truth in what the Lord of Imbercourt advanced; but, nevertheless, between them there still existed a thousand differences of opinion, which would have required an infinite change of circumstances to have removed. The differences of their age, of their station, of their education, and of their habits, were all as much opposed to a coincidence of thought, as the difference of their natural characters itself; and the only point of resemblance between the young citizen and the high-born noble—namely, the fine aspirations and elegant feelings which raised the former above the generality of his class—naturally tended to make him detest those laws of society which held him down in a rank below that for which he was fitted, and look with disgust upon those who maintained them as a barrier against him. At the same time he was conscious that in his bosom there might be some feelings not entirely patriotic, or, at least, he felt afraid that it was so; and, perceiving, also, that the arguments which were addressed to him were far more liberal and plausible than those usually held by the class to which the Lord of Imbercourt belonged, he did not choose to enter into a farther discussion, which might either shake his own determinations, or expose the views on which he acted to those who would take means to foil his designs.

"I am, of course, incompetent, my lord," he replied, "to argue with an experienced statesmen like yourself, on subjects which you must have had a much greater opportunity of examining than I can have had."

Imbercourt watched his countenance during this brief reply; and he was too much versed in the ways of men to be deceived by its apparent modesty. He saw, and saw clearly, that the high and flashing spirit, the keen and acute mind, which the young burgher had displayed at the examination before the council—and which, indeed, had been reported long before to the ministers of the Duke of Burgundy—was curbed and restrained on the present occasion; and he easily divined some of the motives which created such reserve. He saw, too, that it would be necessary to make use of other inducements than those of argument for the purpose of detaching the young citizen from the factious party in Flanders, and of preventing him from giving to their designs the consolidation, the direction, and the vigour which such a mind as his might bestow.

Neither had the slight shade of emotion which had passed

over the countenance of Albert Maurice, when addressed by the princess, escaped his experienced eye; and, though far too proud and aristocratic in his own nature ever to dream that a burgher of Ghent could indulge in the very thought of love towards the heiress of the land, he was sufficiently chivalrous in mind to believe, that a smile from such fair lips, a word from so sweet a voice, might bend a man on whom arguments would prove all useless. He turned, therefore, to the princess, with a smile, saying,—"Well, let us not reason of the past; I think, madam, that you had something to say to this young gentleman concerning the future; and, as it could come with full effect from no lips but yours, I pray you communicate it to him yourself."

"Most willingly will I do so," replied Mary of Burgundy; "and I am sure that I shall not speak in vain. I have heard, and, indeed, I know, Master Albert Maurice, that no man in the good city of Ghent possesses so much influence as yourself with the merchants and people of the good towns. My father being now absent, and likely, I fear, to remain so for some time, —as my dear and excellent stepdame, Margaret his duchess, has been called to join him at Dijon,—and the government of Flanders resting in my weak hands, I am anxious, most anxious, to preserve the country, and especially this city of Ghent—which," she added, with a smile, "has not in all times been famous for its orderly disposition—in peace and tranquillity during my temporary government, which, I pray, God shorten. My request to you, therefore, is, that you will use your best endeavours to still all irritation, to calm all disposition to tumult, and to maintain in the people a spirit of order and quiet. May I trust that you will do so?"

The blood rushed up to the temples of the young citizen with fearful force; and the pain that he experienced for a few moments, till he had determined upon his reply, would be difficult to describe. At length he answered, though with some hesitation.

"Madam," he said, "I feel assured that, under your sway, however long the government of Flanders may be delegated to you by your father, no infraction of the people's rights, no blow at the privileges of the good towns, will, or can take place. Under this conviction, I will willingly promise what you demand, though, in truth, you attribute to me much greater influence than I possess. At the same time, madam, let me pray you to

remember, that if—which God forbid!—evil ministers or tyrannical officers should, as sometimes happens, wrong their master, by trampling on his subjects, I cannot, and I will not, bind myself to support such things, or to oppose my countrymen in seeking to right themselves."

"God forbid, indeed," exclaimed Mary, eagerly, "that you should ever be put to such a trial! Indeed, young gentleman, indeed," she added, while her whole beautiful countenance glowed with enthusiasm, "to merit and to win my people's love, to heal all feuds, to bind up every wound, to wipe the eyes that weep, to raise up the oppressed, to uphold and to promote the virtuous, and to guard the feeble and defenceless, would be the first wish and thought of Mary of Burgundy, were she queen of one half the world."

"Madam, I believe it!—from my heart I believe it!" replied Albert Maurice, catching the enthusiasm of her tone; "and may God bless and prosper you in the performance of so noble an intention!"

As he spoke, he felt that the presence of that fair being had become more dangerous to his resolutions and purposes, perhaps even to his peace, than he could have imagined possible; and, afraid that at every word he might promise more than circumstances might permit him to perform, or bind himself so strictly, that his duty to his country would be lost,—he paused, and drew a step back, in order to take his leave. The Princess saw the movement, and bowed her head, to signify that he was at liberty to depart. "Farewell, sir," she said; "and do not forget the promise you have made."

The young citizen bowed, and retired; and, while Mary remained in deep and anxious conversation with Imbercourt, he made his way back to the antechamber of the audience-hall, which was now empty, and thence into the court of the palace, where he was joined by his uncle, Martin Fruse; and found the Lord of Neufchâtel in the act of mounting his horse. The old nobleman paused for a moment, to read the young citizen a long and stately lecture upon the impropriety of leaving, as he had done, those who had accompanied him to the council chamber, the moment that the examination was over. The mind of Albert Maurice, however, and his heart, were busied about far other things; and the reproof of the old cavalier fell upon a somewhat dull and inattentive ear. He answered with some formal words

of apology, stating that he had been called away unexpectedly; and then, with more energy and feeling, expressed his gratitude for the kindness and services which the Lord of Neufchâtel had rendered him.

"Well, well, no more of that!" cried the old lord; "never shall it be said that I shrunk from the side of an oppressed man, be he noble or not noble. Happy I am that you have so fully cleared yourself, Master Albert Maurice; and whenever the good citizens of Ghent require such aid and advice concerning matters of state and feudal law, as I, from my old acquaintance with courts and camps, can give, let them come freely to consult me, without fear or bashfulness; that is to say, while I am in the city; for, in ten days' time, I go to join the camp, and once more, though the hand be feeble, and the head be grey, to lay lance in rest for Burgundy. However, absent or present, I shall always be happy to do what I can for the good city of Ghent."

Albert Maurice bowed, and his uncle bowed low; and, mounting his horse, though with somewhat less alacrity than he had done in his youthful days, the Lord of Neufchâtel quitted the palace court, and went nodding and smiling through the crowds assembled without. Albert Maurice and his uncle then followed, passing the grim lanes of soldiery that still occupied the interior of the court, with very different feelings from those which they had experienced when they entered its gates. The appearance of the young citizen, after his exculpation, was instantly hailed by the multitudes without, as a sort of popular triumph; and, amidst shouts of joy and congratulation, he was conducted safely to his own dwelling.

CHAPTER XVI.

We must now carry the reader's mind forward to a day a little in advance of that which we last noticed.

It was towards that period of the year which the French call the *short summer of St. Martin*, from the fact of a few lingering bright days of sunshiny sweetness breaking in upon the autumn, as a memorial of the warmer season gone before. The sky was all full of light, and the air full of heat; and the grand

masses of high grey clouds that occasionally floated over the sun were hailed gladly for their soft cool shadow, although the day was the eleventh of November. Sweeping over the prospect, like the mighty but indistinct images of great things and splendid purposes which sometimes cross a powerful but imaginative mind, the shadows of the clouds moved slow over hill and dale, field and forest. Now they cast large masses of the woods into dark and gloomy shade, and left the rising grounds around to stand forth in light and sparkling brightness, giving no bad image of the dark memories that are in every heart, surrounded but not effaced by after joys. Now they floated soft upon the mountains, spreading an airy purple over each dell and cavity; while, pouring into the midst of the valley, the bright orb of day lighted up tower, and town, and farm, and hamlet, and village spire, as hope lights up the existence of man, even while the many clouds of fate hang their heaviest shadows on the prospect around about him. The harmonious hue of autumn, too, was over all the world. Russet was the livery of the year; and the brown fields, preparing for the sower, offered only a deeper hue of the same colour, which, though varied through a thousand shades, still painted every tree throughout the woods, and sobered down even the grassy meadows with a tint far different from that of spring. The sky, with the sunshine that it contained, was all summer; but the aspect of everything that it looked upon spoke of autumn sinking fast into the arms of winter.

Such was the scene upon the banks of the little river Geete, when a party, whose bright dresses and active movements spoke sport and gaiety, rode up the windings of the stream, not far from the place where now stands the little hamlet of Sodoigne. No village, however, stood there then; and the banks of the Geete were bordered for some miles with green meadows, not above two or three hundred yards in breadth. These rich pastures were bounded to the eastward by the forest of Hannut, which swept in irregular masses along the whole course of the river, and were confined on the other hand by the low but broken banks of the watercourse, sometimes, in the steepest parts, lined with bushes, which dipped their very branches in the current, but more often—where the turf and the stream were nearly upon a level—fringed with long green flags and other water plants.

The party who cantered lightly along the meadows consisted of eight persons, of whom three were females; and each of the latter upon her hand bore the glove and falcon, which showed the object of their expedition. The first in state, in loveliness, and in grace, was Mary of Burgundy, mounted on a beautiful white horse adorned with many a goodly trapping, and which, though full of fire and life, she managed with that easy and graceful horsemanship for which she was famous, and which, unhappily, in after years, led to the fatal accident* that deprived the world of one of its brightest ornaments. By her side rode the fair Alice of Imbercourt, her favourite friend and nearest attendant; while another young lady, of inferior rank, but still of noble birth, followed a step behind, somewhat embarrassed by the high spirit of her horse, which she managed well, but with less dexterity than the other two. An elderly gentleman, of mild, complacent, and courtly manners, followed the ladies as their principal attendant; while, of the other four, two habited in green, and furnished with long poles for beating the bushes, together with lures, spare jesses, hoods, and bells, at once showed themselves as official falconers; and the two who brought up the rear, though armed with a degree of precaution that was very necessary in that day, appeared what they really were, namely, simple grooms.

There is something in the excitement of quick riding totally obnoxious to both fear and sadness. It is scarcely possible to conceive a person galloping easily along upon a spirited horse, without feeling his confidence and hope renewed, in some degree, whatever may be the circumstances of his situation. Thus, though in the heart of Mary of Burgundy there was many a memory of painful feelings, of disappointed hopes, and crushed affections; and, though across her mind, whenever she suffered it to rest upon the future, would come dark and painful apprehensions,—still the excitement of the sport, the beauty of the day, and the glow of exercise, had given her a flow of high spirits that she had not known for many a day. Her mirth, indeed, was never overpowering, and, if it reached the bounds of cheerfulness, it seldom went beyond.

Now, however, as they rode along by the banks of the stream, and as the falconers beat the bushes to rouse the objects of their

* She died a few years after this period, in consequence of a fall occasioned by her horse taking fright, while out falconing.

chase, she jested in a tone of gentle gaiety with the fair girl who accompanied her upon all those matters which, to the heart of woman, are the important things of life.

Alice of Imbercourt, on her part, maintained the conversation with the same spirit, jested with the like good-humoured malice in reply to the Princess, and was never without an answer at her need, although she did not for a moment forget, that however high her own rank, Mary of Burgundy held a higher, nor ever failed to mingle with her speech so much of reverence as to show that she had not forgotten the distinction.

"Nay, nay, own, dear Alice," exclaimed the Princess, in reply to something that had passed before, "that day by day you have been bringing me nearer and nearer to a certain castle in the wood; and, in truth, I think that you must have got the noble lord your father to be a confederate in your plot."

"Good sooth, dear lady," replied Alice, "a happy thing were it for us poor women if all fathers were so complacent: I know well where one little heart would be in that case;" and she looked up with an arch smile in the face of the Princess.

However strongly prudence may enjoin them to be silent themselves, all women feel more or less pleasure when the conversation is brought near the subject of their loves. Though Mary of Burgundy would not say one word that she could help, upon the feelings of her own heart, even to so dear and faithful a friend as Alice of Imbercourt, yet she felt no displeasure when the gay girl's tongue touched upon the subject of her affections, although clouds and darkness hung over the prospect, and all hope of their gratification was but faint indeed. At the same time she was, perhaps, a little fearful of the topic ever being carried too far; and, therefore, after a smile, in which melancholy mingled, in some degree, with pleasure, she returned to her own jest with her fair follower, without adding anything more to a subject, on which both, in happier circumstances, might have been well pleased to speak more freely.

"Nay, nay, Alice," she exclaimed, "that was an artful turn, my sweet friend: but you shall not escape so readily. Tell me, did you not put it in your father's head, to think what a fine thing it would be for me to visit all the different towns in Flanders, and win the love of the good burghers? And did you not yourself lay out the very plan of our journey from Ghent to Alost, and thence to Brussels, and thence to Louvaine, and

thence to Tirlemont? And have you not kept me three full days at Tirlemont; and, at last, have you not brought me up the fair river Geete, with our hawks upon our hands, and nobody to watch us, till we are within a league or two of this same castle of Hannut?—Fie, Alice! fie! it is a decided conspiracy!"

Alice laughed gaily, and replied, "Well, lady, if it can be proved, even by the best logic of your beautiful lips, that I do wish to see my lover, I know no woman, who has one, that does not do so too, from the farmer's milkmaid, with her pail upon her head, to the Princess of Burgundy, on her white Spanish jennet."

Mary laughed and sighed. "You own it, then," she answered: "I thought, when last night you were striving hard to persuade me to visit the castle of Hannut, and have my future fate laid bare by the dark and awful skill of this learned uncle of yours, that there was a leaf in the book of fortune, or rather in the book of life, that you would well like to read for yourself. But tell me, Alice," she added, more seriously, "tell me something of this lover, to whom, it seems, you are affianced. There appears some mystery about him, and you, of course, must know more of him than any one else."

"Nay, quite the contrary, my dear lady and mistress," replied Alice of Imbercourt; "that shows how little you know of the sad race called men. His being my lover is the very reason, of all others, why I should know less of him than any other person."

"How so?" demanded the Princess, with a look of surprise.

"Why, simply because, from the moment he becomes my lover," replied Alice of Imbercourt, "he takes the very best possible care to hide every evil quality in his nature and disposition, upon the full and preconcerted plan of not letting me see any one of them till such time as he is my husband. Then, out they come! But that is not all," she continued; "that would only hide a part of his character; but, at the same time that he takes these precautions, I, on my part, like every wise woman, make up my mind, on no account whatever to see any little fault or failing that he may accidentally display—at least, till such time as he is my husband. Then, of course, when nothing more is to be gained or lost, I shall, beyond doubt, take as much pains to find them out as another, and he will take as little to hide them."

"That is a bad plan, Alice," replied the Princess; "that is a bad plan. Find out the faults, if you can, in the lover, while your hand is your own, and your will is free. See them not at all in your husband; for blindness in such a case is woman's best policy. But you mistake me, Alice; it was not of his mind I spoke, but of his situation; for, when questioning my Lord of Imbercourt the other day, he called him your uncle's nephew: now, none of our wise heralds ever heard, it seems, of such a nephew."

A slight blush came up into the cheek of Alice as the Princess spoke; but she replied frankly, "In truth, dear lady, I know nothing on that score; and upon such subjects I have ever thought that if my father was satisfied, I had no reason to complain. All I know is, that my cousin Hugh was brought up at the court of France,—has fought in the civil wars of England, and under Galeas, Duke of Milan,—has gained honour, and knighthood, and glory in the field,—is gentle, and kind, and tender, and affectionate to me; and is—" she added, with a laugh and a blush at the praises which she was pouring forth, and which she felt must betray the whole secret of her heart, but which yet she could not or would not restrain,—"and is as handsome a man, and as graceful a cavalier as ever entered hall or mounted horse."

The Princess smiled, and answered, "Well, well, if he be all that, fair Alice, you are right—quite right—to ask no farther questions. But how is it, good Bartholomew," she cried, turning to one of the falconers,—"how is it?—Can you find no bird; in all the length of this fair stream, for us to fly our hawks?"

"So please your Grace," replied the man, "the air is so sultry that the herons will hardly wade where there is no shelter; but up beyond those bushes, where the bank with its long sedges jets out into the stream, I doubt not we may raise something yet."

The whole party accordingly rode on; and the judgment of the experienced falconer was justified. Under the cool shadow of the bank, one of the feathered fishermen had advanced some way, with his long legs, and, taking fright, at the noise of the horses, he stretched forth his neck, gathered the air under his wings, and soared up at about the distance of twenty or thirty yards from the approaching party. The birds were instantly cast from the wrists of the ladies: the heron, finding himself

pursued, and apparently a crafty old fowl, strove to beat to windward of the hawks, flying as rapidly as possible, and yet keeping himself prepared for sudden defence. All the horses were put to full speed, and in a moment the whole scene became one of cry and confusion.

"Call the merlin up the wind! Call the merlin up the wind!" exclaimed the Princess to the chief falconer. "See! see! he is towering; he will miss his stoop!"

"So ho! woa ho!" cried the falconer, with a loud whistle: "he will make his point yet, your Grace." But the heron, finding himself over-reached, made a dip, skimmed, and evaded the fall or stoop of the falcon, which, being a young bird, had endeavoured to strike it at once, without being perfectly sure of its aim. The clamour and the galloping now became more eager than ever, the bird making directly for the wood, which it seemed likely to gain, notwithstanding the efforts of its pursuers.

The meadow was the finest even ground that could be conceived for such sport; and the rein being freely given to each horse, the whole party dashed on at full speed, without seeing, or caring for, the massy clouds, that, sweeping together over head, directly in the face of a light and flickering wind, which was blowing from the north-west, seemed to threaten a storm of some kind. The air, too, had that sultry, oppressive weight which one often feels in the neighbourhood of a great forest; and the horses—animals peculiarly susceptible to the sensations produced by an atmosphere overcharged with electricity—seemed more eager and fiery than usual, and were soon in a complete lather of foam.

The grey merlin which had been carried by Mary of Burgundy retrieved the error of its first eagerness, and cutting between the heron and the wood, kept it off for some time over the meadow and the stream. The sport was thus in its highest point of interest, and the horses in full career, when a sudden flash of lightning broke across their path, and startled the whole party. Each horse involuntarily recoiled. The Princess and Alice of Imbercourt both kept their seats, but the young lady who followed them, less skilful in her management, was thrown violently to the ground; while her horse, wild with fright, dashed madly across the meadow, and plunged into the stream. The falconers rode forward to whistle back their hawks—the service most important in their eyes,—and one of the grooms

galloped after the frightened horse, in order to catch him ere he was irrecoverably lost. But the rest of the party, instantly dismounting, surrounded the poor girl who had met with the accident, whom they found severely bruised, but not otherwise dangerously hurt. She complained bitterly, however, and, as if conscious that she was not a very interesting person otherwise, made the most of her misfortune to engross attention.

The horse and the hawks were soon recovered, but it became now the question, what was to be the course of their farther proceedings. Large drops of rain were beginning to fall — everything portended a tremendous storm. The young lady who had fallen was too much bruised to sit her horse with ease, and was, or appeared to be, too much terrified to attempt it again. She, nevertheless, entreated the Princess and her companions to return as fast as possible towards Tirlemont, leaving her where she was, with some one to protect her, and to send a litter from the town to bring her home. But to this the Princess would by no means consent; and it having been suggested by one of the grooms, who knew the country well, that at the distance of about half a mile in the wood there was a small chapel dedicated to Nôtre-Dame du bon Secours, it was determined that the whole party should take refuge there, and wait till the storm was over, or till one of the attendants could procure litters for the ladies from Tirlemont.

They accordingly proceeded on their way, under the guidance of the groom, who alone knew the situation of the chapel; and, skirting round under the branches of the taller trees, endeavoured to obtain some shelter as they went from the large drops of rain that, slow and heavy, but far apart, seemed scarcely so much to fall as to be cast with violence from the heaven to the earth. The clouds, in the meantime, came rolling slowly up, seeming to congregate over the forest from every part of the sky; but still it was some minutes before another flash of lightning followed the first; and the whole party had reached the glade in the wood, which the groom assured them led direct to the chapel, ere a second bright blaze broke across the gloomy air, now shadowed into a kind of mid-day twilight by the dull, thick, leaden masses of vapour above. The roar of the thunder followed a few seconds after; and though it was evident that the storm had not reached that degree of intensity which it was destined soon to attain, the Princess and her attendants did not neglect the warning, but

hastened on as rapidly as possible, though the long grass, cut merely by the tracks of wood-carts, and mingled thickly with brambles and many sorts of weeds, impeded them greatly on their way.

The road—if the glade or opening in the forest could so be called—led on in that straight line of direct progression, which seems to have been the original plan of road-making in most countries, proceeding with a proud disdain of obstacles and difficulties, into the deepest valleys, and up the sides of the steepest hills, without one effort by sweep or turn of any kind to avoid either. Thus, a few minutes after the entrance of the princess's party into the forest, the groom led the way over the side of a hill, down the steep descent of which the trunks and arching boughs of the trees might be seen in long perspective, forming a regular alley, filled with a kind of dim and misty light. At the end of the descent, however, the trees, in some degree, broke away to the westward, and a steep hill rose suddenly before the travellers, which seemed as if, at its original formation, it had started up so abruptly, as to have shaken a part of the primeval forest from one of its sides. The other side was clothed with tall trees to the very top. Over the shoulder of this hill,—just between the part which remained wooded, and the part which, sloping down to the wood below, lay for the distance of several acres, either entirely bare or merely covered with scattered brushwood,—the road, now assuming a sandy appearance, climbed straight up to a spot where a small building with a conical roof was seen, standing out from the dark wood, at the very top of the rise, and cutting sharp upon a gleam of yellow light, which—dimmed by the falling shower and fast closing up under the gathering clouds—still lingered in the western sky.

The sight of the chapel, for so it was, gave fresh vigour to all the party; and Mary, with her followers, hastened up, and reached the little shrine before another flash of lightning came. The chapel, as usual with such buildings in that age, was constructed for the mere purpose, either of affording a temporary refuge to the benighted or storm-stayed traveller, or of giving the pious and devout an opportunity of offering up their prayers or thanksgivings for a favourable journey begun or completed, before an image of the Virgin, which filled a niche in the far part of the edifice, protected from profaning hands by a strong grating

of iron. Whether the building itself was kept up by casual donations, or by some small endowment, I do not know; but, at all events, the funds which supported it were too small for the maintenance of an officiating priest; and hermits, who had occasionally supplied the place in former ages, were now becoming "of the rare birds of the earth," at least in the north of Europe. Thus the chapel was totally vacant when the Princess and her attendants reached it; and after murmuring a prayer at the shrine, while one of the grooms was despatched to Tirlemont, to give notice of Mary's situation, the most courageous of the party who remained placed themselves at the door of the little building, to watch the progress of the approaching storm. As no one dreamed of profaning the sanctity of the place, by making it a shelter for their horses, the grooms received orders to tie them as strongly as possibly under some of the neighbouring trees; and one was thus secured under a large elm, which rose a few yards in advance of the chapel.

The commanding situation of the building, being pitched high up on one of the most elevated hills in the wood, gave a wide view over the country around, and afforded as beautiful a forest scene as the mind of man can imagine. First, beyond the little sandy road, by the side of which the chapel stood, extended, as I have before said, several acres of broken mountain turf, sloping down with a considerable descent, and only interrupted here and there by a solitary tree, or a clump of bushes. Farther on again the eye wandered over many miles of rich wood-land, clothed in all the splendid hues of autumn, from the dark shadowy green of the pine to the bright golden yellow of the sear aspen; and where the ocean of forest ended, it caught the faint blue lines of a level country beyond.

At the time I speak of, the sky was full of clouds, and the yellow light which had struggled for a time to keep its place in the heavens was now totally obscured. Large dull masses, as hard and defined as if formed of some half-molten metal, rolled slowly along the heavens, while across them floated far more rapidly some light fleecy vapours of a whitish grey. From the far extreme of these clouds was seen pouring in long straight lines the heavy shower—in some places so dark as totally to obscure everything beyond; but in other spots so thin and clear, that through the film of rain the eye caught the prospect of a bright and sunshiny land, over which the clouds had not yet extended

themselves,—not unlike the distant view of bright scenes, which the unquelled hopes of early life still show us through the tears and storms that at times beset our youth.

Each moment seemed to add something to the gloom of the sky; and scarcely were the party well housed, when another bright flash, followed close by the roar of the thunder, passed eagerly over the scene. The young lady who had fallen from her horse remained close to the shrine; but Mary of Burgundy, with her arm through that of Alice of Imbercourt, still stood by the door, looking out upon the prospect below them. The last flash of lightning, however, was so near, that Mary's eye caught a small thin line of pale-coloured but excessively vivid light, which seemed to dart like a fiery serpent between herself and the near tree, under which one of the horses was tied.

"Alice, I will look no more," she said: "that flash was so near it made me giddy;" and withdrawing her arm, she retired into the farther part of the chapel, and closed another small door which opened from the right-hand side of the shrine into the forest behind the building.

"You are not afraid, lady?" said Alice, with a smile.

"No, certainly not afraid," replied Mary; "for I know that He whose weapon is the lightning, can strike as well in the palace or the tower as in the open field; but still it is useless to deny that there is something very awful in the sights and sounds of such a storm as this. It seems as if one were in the presence, and heard the voice of the Almighty."

"It is very grand," replied Alice of Imbercourt; "but from my youth I have been taught to look upon the storm as the finest spectacle in nature; and I would rather see the lightnings go tilting on their fiery horses through the sky, and hear the roaring trumpets of the thunder, than sit in the gayest pavilion that ever was stretched with hands, to witness the brightest tournament that ever monarch gave."

"You are poetical, Alice," cried the Princess; "had old George Chatelain been here, he would have made fine verses out of that speech——But, gracious Heaven, what a flash!"

As she spoke, there came, indeed, one of those tremendous flashes of lightning that literally wrap the whole sky in flame, and, for the brief space that it endured, lighted up every part of the inside of the chapel, with a splendour that was painful to the eye. At the same time Alice, who still stood by the door, saw

clearly the brighter waving line of more intense fire which accompanied the broad flash dart from a spot nearly above their heads, and streaming downward with fierce rapidity, strike one of the noblest trees on the edge of the wood below, and tear it in one moment into atoms. She almost fancied she could hear the rending groan of the stout oak, as it was shivered by the bolt of heaven; but nearly in the same instant the thunder followed, with a sound as if a thousand rocks had been cast on the roof above their heads; and another and another flash succeeded, before the report of the first had died away. Then came a momentary pause—calm, heavy, and silent, without a breath of air to stir the boughs, or to relieve the sultry oppressiveness of the atmosphere, and without a sound, save the fall of an occasional drop of rain.

The duration of this state of repose was but brief. The whole air over the forest seemed surcharged with electricity; and in a moment after, with a loud whizzing noise, not unlike that of a musket bullet when it passes near the head, a large ball of fire rushed rapidly by the chapel, in a line raised not more than a few yards above the ground, and pitched upon the point of a rock at a little distance below, where, after quivering and wavering for a moment, it broke into a thousand fragments with a loud explosion, and vanished entirely. The lightning and the thunder now succeeded each other so quickly, that there seemed scarcely an instant's interval; and flash after flash, roar after roar, continued without intermission, while every now and then the sight of a tree rent to pieces in the distant prospect marked the work of the lightning; and the forest, and the rocks, and the hills echoed and re-echoed the thunder, so that the sound became absolutely incessant.

This had continued for about half an hour, and still Alice of Imbercourt had remained gazing out upon the scene, as well as the old cavalier, who accompanied them as their principal attendant, when she suddenly exclaimed,—"Good God! how extraordinary! There seems to be a thick cloud gathering upon the edge of the wood, and rolling up the hill towards us, sweeping the ground as it comes. Holy Virgin! the lightning is flashing out of it like that from the sky!—This is very terrible, indeed!"

"Come back, Alice, I beseech—I entreat!" exclaimed the Princess: "you may lose your sight or your life—you are tempting your fate."

But Alice did not seem to hear, for she still continued gazing out from the door, although it was very evident that she now had also taken alarm.

"Now, gracious God, be merciful unto us!" she exclaimed; "for this is the most terrible thing I ever saw! It is fast rolling up the hill!"

"Come away, lady, come away," cried the old cavalier, seizing her by the arm, and leading her from the door; "this is no sight to look upon;" and he drew her back towards the Princess.

Alice once more turned her head to gaze; and then, overcome with what she saw, she cast herself down upon her knees, throwing her arms around Mary, as if to protect her from the approaching destruction, exclaiming,—"Oh, my princess! my princess! God protect thee in this terrible hour!"

Mary's hand was very cold; but, in the moment of great danger, she showed herself more calm and firm than her more daring companion. "God will protect me," she said, in a soft low voice, "if such be His good pleasure; and if not, His will be done."

As she spoke, a tremendous flash illuminated the whole of the inside of the building, accompanied—not followed—by a crash, as if two worlds had been hurled together in their course through space.

The eyes of every one in the chapel, it is probable, were closed at that moment, for no one saw the small door by the side of the shrine thrown open. But the first who looked up was Mary of Burgundy; and a sudden cry, as she did so, called the attention of all the rest. They instantly perceived the cause of the Princess's surprise and alarm; for close beside her, in the midst of the chapel, stood a tall powerful man, habited in the ordinary equipment of a man-at-arms of that day, with the unusual circumstance, however, of every part of his garb being of a peculiar shade of green; which colour was also predominant in the dress of half-a-dozen others who appeared at the door by the shrine.

He gave no one time to express their surprise. "Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, "do you not see the ground lightning coming up the hill! Fly, fly for your lives; it will be over the chapel in a moment. Matthew, catch up some of the women. Karl, take that one who has fainted. Let the men follow me as fast as possible, and we shall soon be out of the direction it is taking."

So saying, and without farther ceremony, he caught up Alice

of Imbercourt in his powerful arms. One of his companions lifted the Princess, and another raised the form of the young lady who had fallen from her horse in the morning, and whose terror had now cast her into a swoon, and, darting through the door by which they had entered, the Vert Gallant of Hannut and his companions passed out into that part of the forest which swept up to the back of the chapel. Striking on as fast as possible towards the east, he took his way over the other edge of the hill, in a direction opposite to that in which Alice had been looking. The lightning flashed around them as they went, the thunder roared loud at every step, and the rain, which had ceased for a time, began again to drop, at first slowly, but after a few minutes in a more heavy and continuous shower, which, pattering thick through the withered leaves of the wood, drenched the unfortunate hawking party to the skin.

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed the Vert Gallant: "this rain will drown yon accursed cloud, and we shall get rid of the ground lightning."

These were the only words he spoke; but, with rapid steps, he continued to bear on his fair burden for nearly a quarter of an hour, with apparently the same ease, and in somewhat of the same position, that a mother carries her child. Two of his sturdy companions followed loaded in the same way;—and so complete was the helpless terror of the whole party who had accompanied Mary of Burgundy, that they yielded themselves passively, and without a word of inquiry, to the guidance of the green riders; a body of men who acknowledged no law, though a sort of generous and chivalric spirit amongst themselves seemed, in some degree, to supply the place of the authority they had cast off. It is true, indeed, that resistance or question would have been in vain; for the superior numbers of these free gentlemen of the forest set at defiance all opposition on the part of the princess's attendants, and a sort of taciturnity seemed to reign amongst them which did not at all encourage inquiry.

After proceeding steadily and rapidly for the space of time above mentioned, over a rough and uneven road, sometimes down the side of a wooded hill, where no unpractised foot could have kept its hold—sometimes through deep ravines, which the torrents of rain that were now falling had converted into watercourses—sometimes over the trunks of trees that had been felled and shattered by the fire of heaven—with the lightning flashing

round their heads, and the thunder rolling above them, the Vert Gallant and his companions at length reached a deep dell, from one side of which rose up a steep and rocky bank, forming the base of the hill which they had just descended.

At the height of a few yards above the bottom of the valley, which was itself marshy and filled with long flags and rushes, was the mouth of a low-browed cave, to which the Vert Gallant immediately directed his steps. He was obliged to bow his head to enter; but within, it became more lofty; and, though it did not run above nine or ten yards into the mountain, the cavity afforded a complete shelter from the storm and rain. The moment he had entered, the leader of the free companions gently freed Alice from his arms; and then, in a low and respectful voice, he said,—"You will here, fair ladies, find some security. Keep as far as you can from the mouth of the cave, and there is little fear of any danger. You, sirs," he continued, in a sterner tone, turning to the male followers of the Princess, "should have known better than to have placed this lady,—who, if I judge right, must be an object of no small solicitude to every subject of the House of Burgundy,—in the most exposed and dangerous situation of the whole forest."

"Good faith, Sir Green Knight," said the old gentleman who had accompanied the Princess, "we certainly did not know that it was so dangerous, or we should neither have placed her in it, nor ourselves, as you may well suppose. And now, sir," he continued, with a voice the slight tremulousness of whose tone showed that he was not without some apprehensions of another kind—"and now, sir, that you have the lady in your power—be she princess or not—I trust that you will deal fairly and honourably with her. Our purses are, of course, at your disposal, as well as our jewels, &c.; but I give you notice that——"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Vert Gallant, the beaver of whose helmet was still down, "talk not to me of purses, sir, and jewels! —Madam," he continued, turning to the Princess, "suffer not, I beseech you, the vain and vulgar fears of this old man to affect you for a moment: the Vert Gallant of Hannut takes no purses from wandering travellers, nor draws the sword against ladies—far less against the Princess of Burgundy. Rest here in safety, with your fair companions," he added, turning slightly towards Alice of Imbercourt; "and we, who have brought you hither, and have been your unseen attendants ever since you were

flying your hawks by the side of the river, will guard you as well, or better, than if you were in your father's palace."

"I owe you many thanks, sir," replied Mary; "more, indeed, than I can at present express; for this dreadful storm has left my ideas somewhat confused. However, I am satisfied that to your prompt assistance I stand indebted for my life."

"Perhaps, madam, you do," replied the Vert Gallant; "for I feel convinced that, had that cloud reached the chapel before you quitted it, the coronet of Burgundy would be now without an heiress. Think me not ungenerous, madam," he added, "if I ask a boon in return. It is this—that if, some day, I should need your voice to support a petition with your father—or if you should, at the time, hold the reins of government yourself, when I may have occasion to make a request before the chair of Burgundy—you will give me your influence in the one case, or grant my desire in the other."

There was something in the tone and in the manner of the speaker at once so gentle and so lofty, that Mary of Burgundy could not but think that his present adventurous life must be one more of necessity than of choice; and she doubted not, that the petition to which he alluded must be for pardon for his past offences. She gazed at him for a moment or two before she replied, as he stood towering above the seven or eight strong men who accompanied him, and who had now grouped themselves round the mouth of the cave, watching, as it appeared, every word of their leader's mouth with a sort of reverential attention.

"If it be wrong, sir," she replied, "for simple individuals to make rash promises, it is still more so for princes. But where gratitude, such as I owe you, is concerned, even prudence might seem ungenerous. I must qualify, however, in some degree, the promise you desire, and say, that if your request, when it is made, prove nothing contrary to my own honour or dignity, I will give it all my influence with my father, should it depend upon him; or grant it myself, should it depend upon me.—Does that satisfy you?"

"Most fully, madam," replied the Vert Gallant; "and I return you deep thanks for your kind assent."

"I doubt not," said Mary, "that what you have to ask will be far less than a compensation for the service you have rendered me. However, accept this jewel," she added, taking a ring from her finger and giving it to him, "as a testimony of the promise

I have made; and with it let me add, many thanks for your honourable courtesy."

The leader of the free companions received the ring with due acknowledgments; and after a few words more upon the same subject, he bowed low, as if to take his leave, and made a step towards the mouth of the cavern.

"You are not, surely, going to expose yourself to such a storm as this," exclaimed Alice of Imbercourt, with a degree of eagerness that made her mistress smile, and declare afterwards—when, in a place of security, they could look upon the dangers of the forest as a matter of amusement—that Alice had certainly been smitten with the distinction which the Vert Gallant had shown her, in carrying her in his own arms through the wood, although he knew that a princess was present.

"The storm is abating, lady," replied the freebooter; "and besides, *we* fear no weather. I myself go to give notice to those who can receive you as you should be received, that such a noble party require better shelter and entertainment than we poor adventurers can afford you. My men, though they must keep out of sight, will be near enough to yield you protection and assistance, on one blast of a horn.—Horns are strange magical things in this wood," he added; "for though all the hunters in the world might go blowing their mots, from one end of the forest to the other, without seeing aught but boar or deer, I will soon show you that we can conjure up beasts of another kind."

So saying, he approached the mouth of the cavern, and wound his horn with a long, shrill, peculiar blast; when, in a moment after, from the opposite part of the wood, a man, bearing the appearance of a mounted squire, trotted rapidly forth, leading a strong black charger, which he at once brought up to the mouth of the cave. A few words whispered by the Vert Gallant to the men who had accompanied him hitherto, caused them instantly to quit the place where they had taken refuge; and, dispersing themselves over the side of the hill, the whole were in a few minutes lost to the sight amongst the trees and bushes. Their leader, once more, bowed low to the Princess, sprang upon his horse, dashed rapidly down the rough and uneven side of the hill, plunged through the marsh that lined the bottom of the valley, and, in a moment after, was seen followed by his squire, winding in and out through the tall trees on the opposite slope, till the turn of the hill hid him from view.

They were the eyes of Alice of Imbercourt which thus followed him on his course; for the Princess had seated herself on a mass of rock in the farther end of the cave; and her other young attendant, stupified with all the terrors and dangers she had gone through, though now recovered from her swoon, continued sitting in silence on the ground, where the soldier who had carried her had set her down, and still kept her hands clasped over her eyes, as if every moment would show her some horrible sight.

The storm had, nevertheless, abated considerably already. The rain, it is true, continued to pour down in torrents, and an occasional flash of lightning still broke across the sky; but it was dim, as if half extinguished by the deluge through which it glared. The thunder, too, followed at a longer interval; and each succeeding flash was at a greater and a greater lapse of time from the one that preceded it.

Thus about an hour and a half passed away, during which the different members of the falconing party amused themselves as they best might; the groom talking with the falconers about the gallant horses they had left tied at the top of the hill, lamenting the fright and drenching they must have been exposed to, and expressing some apprehension that the good gentleman in green, who had hurried them away so fast from the chapel, might take advantage of their absence to carry off their good horses, the worst of which, he declared, was worth fifty golden crowns of Florence at the lowest computation. The falconers, on the other hand, who had taken care to bring away their birds with them, busied themselves actively in providing for the comfort of their hawks; and each administered to the falcon under his special charge a small ball of choice medicaments, extracted from a pouch that every one carried by his side, in order to guard the stomachs of those noble fowls from any evil as a consequence of the storm.

The old gentleman, who might be considered—what we should call in the present day—the chaperon of the party, stood by the side of the Princess, and addressed to her, from time to time, with sweet unmeaning smiles and courtly language, a variety of easy flowing sentences, very pleasant and harmonious, but signifying nothing. Alice, on her part, generally remained silent and thoughtful, though seemingly a little agitated, and perhaps, not displeased, at the probability of revisiting the castle

of Hannut. Sometimes she would sit at the side of the Princess, and talk to her, with all the light gaiety of her character; but, at others, she would fall into long pauses of deep and silent thought; or would stand at the mouth of the cave, and watch the diminishing rain and the storm as it passed away. Every minute it decreased in some degree; and even the poor girl who had fallen from her horse, and who was clearly the most timid of the whole party, began to look up, and to venture an occasional word to those around her.

At length, when the day was somewhat far advanced, a low whistle was heard at a considerable distance, was taken up by some one nearer, and then repeated from more than twenty places in the wood, till at last it sounded close by the cave. All then relapsed into profound silence; but at the end of about ten minutes more, a distant trampling sound was heard; and, on looking forth from the mouth of the cave, Alice perceived, winding up from the extreme of the valley, a gay cavalcade, consisting of a couple of horse litters, escorted by about twenty spearmen on horseback, bearing the colours of the Lord of Hannut.

CHAPTER XVII.

The sight of the approaching party was very acceptable to every one of the persons in the cave, who were not a little tired of their situation, after having waited for nearly two hours, watching the dying away of a thunder-storm, which, even then, left no better prospect than that the hard leaden clouds which had poured forth the lightning would soften into the showery haze of an unsettled autumn night.

The troop, however, seemed to approach but slowly,—every now and then pausing and looking round the valley, as if doubtful of the exact place to which their steps should be directed. At length, Alice took an impatient step out into the shower, and was followed by one of the falconers; who soon attracted the notice of the horsemen by one of the long and peculiar whoops practised in his vocation. The moment after, a young cavalier, habited in the furs and embroideries which designated

a man of noble rank in the county of Flanders, dashed forward from the rest; and the next instant Hugh de Mortmar was by the side of his fair Alice.

A few words of explanation sufficed. A strange horseman, he said, whom the warder described as bearing the appearance of one of the free companions who infested the country, had given notice at the barbacan of the castle, that the Princess Mary and her train were storm-stayed in that valley which in the forest bore the name of "The Valley of the Marsh;" and that, of course, he had instantly set out to render service and assistance.

The young gentleman then, with deep respect, tendered his aid to the Princess. Mary and her attendants were soon placed in the litters, or mounted on the spare horses; and, as it was too late to think of returning to Tirlemont, the whole party wound onward towards the castle of Hannut. At the earnest request of the chief groom, however, as the road by the chapel was not longer than that by which the young noble had come, it was preferred in returning to the castle, in order to relieve the horses which had been left tied in the neighbourhood; and, choosing a longer but easier ascent than that which had been trod so rapidly by the Vert Gallant some hours before, the Princess was soon once more on the spot from which she had been carried in the thunder-storm.

The scene that she there beheld was not a little awful. Three of the walls of the chapel, indeed, remained, but that was all; and the time-dried wood-work which had supported the tall conical roof, now lay on what had once been the floor, still blackened and smouldering, though the fire which had been kindled by the lightning was well nigh extinguished by the subsequent rain. The chapel itself, however, though it showed how terrible her own fate might have been, was not, perhaps, the most fearful object that the spot presented. The tall, majestic tree which had stood alone, a few yards in advance of the building, was rent to the very ground; and, amidst the shivered boughs and the yellow leaves with which they were covered, lay motionless the beautiful horse that had been tied there, with its strong and energetic limbs—but a few hours before full of wild life and noble fire—now cold and stiff,—the wide expansive nostril, small and collapsed—the clear eye, dim and leaden, and the proud head cast powerless down the bank.

There are few things show so substantially the mighty and awful power of death as to see a noble horse killed by some sudden accident. The moment before, it stands at the sublimest point of animal existence—as if the living principle were yielded to it in a greater share than to any other thing,—and the next it is shapeless carrion.

"Alas, the poor horse!" cried Mary, when her eyes fell upon the gallant beast lying stretched out beneath the tree: "alas, the poor horse!" But, running along the chain of association, her mind speedily reverted to herself, and the fate she had so narrowly escaped; and, closing her eyes, while the litter was borne on, she spent a few moments in thankful prayer.

The other horses, which had been tied at a little distance to the east of the chapel, appeared to have broken their bridles from fear, and escaped. The trees under which they had been fastened remained uninjured by the storm, but no trace could be discovered of the animals themselves.

After the lapse of a few minutes spent in the search, the cavalcade moved on at a quicker pace; and Mary of Burgundy soon observed, with a smile, that Hugh de Mortmar, though often at the side of the litter in which she herself was placed, offering all those formal attentions which her rank and station required, was still more frequently in the neighbourhood of the one which followed, and which contained her fair attendant, Alice, alone. The young waiting-woman, who shared the princess's conveyance, remarked the particular attentions of the young lord also, and commented on it with some acerbity: but her jealous anger was soon repressed by Mary's sweet smile; and ere long the whole cavalcade wound through the barbacan and the manifold gates of the castle of Hannut.

The retainers of the lord of the mansion, drawn up in the court-yards, received the heiress of Burgundy and Flanders with feudal reverence; and the old lord himself waited bare-headed to hand her from the vehicle which had conveyed her thither. She was instantly conducted to the apartments which Alice of Imbercourt had inhabited during her stay; and a part of the wardrobe which the fair girl had left behind, in the hope of a speedy return, now served to replace the damp garments of the Princess.

On returning from the chamber where she had made this change of dress to the little sitting-room or bower—as it was

called, in the castles of the nobility of that time—the Princess found that supper had been laid out for her there, rather than in the hall! but at the same time she perceived, by the solitary cover which graced the table, while the Lord of Hannut and Hugh de Mortmar stood by to attend upon her, that she was to be served with all the formal state and ceremony of a sovereign princess.

"Nay, nay, my lord," she said, as she remarked the fact, "I must not suffer all this. While I am here, I must have you consider me as a wandering demoiselle, whom you have delivered from danger and distress, and with whose rank or station you are unacquainted. All, therefore, of noble blood, must sit and partake with me of my supper, or I partake not myself."

The old Lord of Hannut, well knowing the formal ceremony maintained at the court of Burgundy, especially during the previous reign, would fain have remonstrated; but Mary cut him short, laying her hand kindly and gently on the old man's arm, and saying, in a soft and somewhat playful tone, "Must Mary of Burgundy command?—Well, then, be it so:—we command you, my lord, to forget from this moment that there is any one beneath your roof but a dear friend of your sweet niece, Alice. Believe me," she added, more seriously, "that I know no greater enjoyment than to cast aside the trammels of state, and the cold weight of ceremony, and let my heart play free. To me, it is like what you, my lords, must have felt in unbuckling your armour after a long days' tournament."

Although the politeness of that day was of the stately and rigid kind, which might have required the Lord of Hannut to press further the ceremonious respect he had been about to show, he had too much of the truer politeness of the heart not to yield at once to the Princess's wishes thus expressed. More covers were instantly laid upon the table; and, assuming easily the station of host, in place of that of feudal subject, he treated his fair guests during supper with easy courtesy, mingled indeed, but not loaded, with respect.

The time passed pleasantly, and many a varied strain of conversation, regarding all those matters which were interesting in that age, whiled the minutes insensibly away. The common subjects, indeed, connected with the state of society as it then existed,—arms, and love, and the hunting-field, the news of

the day, and the gossip of the town,—were the first things spoken of, as matters on which all could converse. But speedily, as each tried the other's powers, and found that there were less ordinary topics on which they might communicate, the conversation turned to arts, to letters, and to the human mind. Hugh de Mortmar, whose travels through many lands had made him acquainted with things but scantily known even at the luxurious court of Burgundy, told of the efforts that Italy was then beginning to make to cast off the darkness which had so long hung over her states, described many a beautiful object which he had seen in the land of ancient arts, and rose into enthusiasm as he spoke of Medici, and of all that his magnificent efforts were likely to restore to Italy.

The newly discovered art of printing, too, was mentioned and discussed, and surmises of what it might one time accomplish were ventured on that occasion which would astonish those who see them only partly realized even in the present day. But it was, perhaps, one of the weaknesses of that age to attribute great and mysterious powers to everything that was new and unusual; and, though clear and philosophical reasoning guided the Lord of Hannut to some of his anticipations in regard to printing, a vague degree of superstition, or perhaps it might better be called mysticism, added not a little. It was an easy transition from considering what the mind could do, to consider what the mind of man even then did; and Mary, half fearful of offending, yet with her curiosity not a little excited, led the conversation to those dark and mysterious arts, in the study of which the Lord of Hannut was supposed to pass the greater part of his time. Upon that branch of what were then called the dark sciences, which referred to the communication of mortal beings with the spiritual world, the old Lord was profoundly silent; but in the accuracy and reality of the art by which man was then supposed to read his future fate, from the bright and mysterious orbs of heaven, he expressed his most deep and sincere conviction.

"Many a long and weary night, many a deep and anxious thought, have I given," he said, "to the subject; and, after the study of nearly forty years—after searching philosophy and Scripture—after consulting the learned and the wise—I cannot doubt, madam, that the science which the Chaldee shepherds studied and acquired in the plains of the East has come down to

us, though not in the degree of clear accuracy to which they had brought it. Our calculations are sometimes slightly wrong,—a day—a month—a year sometimes, too early or too late,—but, on examination, I have always found that the error was in the imperfection of my own knowledge, not in a deceitful prognostication of the stars."

The mind of woman is naturally more bent toward superstition than that of man. Mary of Burgundy had heard her father rave against astrologers as quacks and impostors, especially whenever their predictions did not accord with his own designs; but she had heard him also express, on many an occasion, a desire for their counsel; and even the abuse which he showered upon them, had shown her how much importance he attached to their predictions. Her belief, indeed, in their skill was not untinged with doubt—more, indeed, than was usual in that age—but nevertheless it was still belief; and the calm and serious assurances of a man so famous for his wisdom and his skill as the Lord of Hannut, raised that belief, for the time, to certainty.

"I wish," she replied, with a smile, in answer to what he had last said—"I wish that I had here noted down the exact day, and hour, and minute of my birth, that I might ask you, my lord, to give me some insight into my future fate."

"Were such really your wishes, lady," answered the old nobleman, "your desire might soon be gratified. Too much interest have I ever felt in the house of Burgundy, not to obtain every particle of information necessary to discover exactly, as far as human science can reach, the destinies and fate of each child of that race."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mary; "and can you, then, calculate for me, with any degree of accuracy, the lot that is likely to befal me in life?"—and her eyes, as she spoke, turned with a glance of inquiring interest towards Alice of Imbercourt, as if for confirmation of her belief in the old lord's skill.

"I can do more, lady," said the Lord of Hannut: "I can show you a page where the whole is already written. While you were yet in the cradle, the interest which every one takes in those who are destined to rule nations, led me to draw the scheme of your nativity, and to learn everything concerning your part in the future, which human science could discover. At the same time, the famous Anthony of Palermo separately under-

took the same task; and, after mature deliberation, though at the distance of many hundred miles, each sent to the other a transcript of the result. The difference between our calculations was so slight as scarcely to merit the name; and I can now place before your eyes the two combined. I pledge my word to you, that more than eighteen years have elapsed since those calculations were made; and from the past, which you cannot doubt, you shall learn to judge of the future. Do you desire to see it?"

Mary turned somewhat pale, and paused ere she replied; but at length she answered,—"I do; and thank you, sir."

"The book in which that eventful page is written," said the Lord of Hannut, "must never leave the chamber where it has been so long preserved; and I can but suffer one person to accompany you to its perusal. Choose, then, lady! who shall it be?"

"Alice," said the Princess, "will you go with me?"

"Willingly—willingly," replied the lively girl, "if my uncle promises beforehand to call up no spirits to terrify us out of our senses."

"Let me beseech you not to go, madam," exclaimed the old cavalier who had accompanied them thither: "I never yet did know any one who attempted to pry into the hidden secrets of fate, who did not bitterly repent it."

"Madam," said the Lord of Hannut, "follow, I entreat, your own judgment alone. I urge you not to read or to forbear; yet, as far as my memory serves me, you may read without much apprehension; for though you may have many a painful scene yet to go through—as who in life has not?—still there will be bright days, and many, before the end."

"I will go, my lord," replied Mary. "Come, Alice, lend me your arm. My lord, I will follow you."

"Ho, without, there!—a light!—a light!" exclaimed the Lord of Hannut. "Pause yet a moment, lady. The sun is down, and the dim and narrow passages of this building are not to be trod by a stranger without more light than yon twilight sky will now afford. Bear a torch to the end of the gallery, Roger," he added, speaking to a tall old man, who appeared at his summons. "Now, madam, permit me to lead you on."

Thus speaking, he took the hand of the Princess reverently in his own, and led her from the chamber, followed by Alice of

Imbercourt. The next moment, Mary found herself in a long gallery, pierced by many windows turned to the westward, through which might be seen the fiery streaks left by the setting sun upon the verge of the stormy sky. Manifold doors opened opposite to these windows, and between the apertures the effigies of many a warrior frowned in steel, while the red glare of the sunset flashed upon the polished armour, as each suit stood supported by its wooden figure, giving to all the prominent points a bloody hue—akin to the associations that the sight of those implements of war called up. At the end of this long corridor was a wide archway, at which, ere Mary had paced half the length of the gallery, a figure took its place, bearing a lighted torch; and though the whole arrangement of the building was, in that age, more common, and consequently appeared less gloomy, than it would seem at present, still there was an aspect of solemn grandeur about it, that raised, and yet saddened, the feelings of Mary of Burgundy, as she advanced in the firm belief that she was about to see the scheme of her future life laid open before her eyes.

Passing through the archway, with the torch-bearer preceding them, the old lord and his two fair companions wound round the greater part of the building, in order to reach the apartment in which he pursued his studies, without passing through the common hall; and as they swept along the dark and narrow passages, with the torch-light flashing on the rude and mouldered stone, the sense of awe and expectation increased in the bosom of the Princess almost to the height of pain. Alice, too, felt it, and was profoundly silent; and when at length they entered the chamber, in which the lonely hours of a long life had been spent in solitary and mysterious study, she gazed around her with a glance of curiosity and apprehension, which clearly showed that she herself had never set her foot within its walls before. The silver lamp hung lighted from the roof; and the attendant with his torch drew back to let them pass, carefully avoiding, however, to set his foot across the threshold.

Mary's heart beat quick; and she now began to ask herself whether she had any right to unveil that awful future over which the Almighty has cast so profound a shadow. What was she about to do? To learn her fate, without the possibility of changing it—to acquire the knowledge of each event that was to happen, without the power of avoiding or ruling it as it arose—to mark

every danger while yet it lay in the womb of the future—to foreknow every pang while yet it was far distant—to sip the cup of agony and fear, drop by drop, long before fate compelled her to the draught—and to make each day miserable with the certainty of the morrow's sorrow.

While such thoughts passed through her mind, the old noble took down one of the large volumes from the cabinet, and unfastening the golden clasps with which it was bound, he laid it on the desk beneath the lamp.—"Madam," he said, "you wished to know the fate of your future years;—it is now before you. Event by event I have marked the current of the past, and I have found no error yet in what is there written. Read, then, if you will, and with full confidence; for as sure as that we all live, and that we all must die, every turn of your coming existence is, there, written down."

Mary took a step forward towards the book—laid her fair hand upon the yellow leaves—then paused, and gazed upwards for a moment. "No!" she exclaimed at length—"no! it is wiser—it is better as it is! Most merciful was the decree of the Most High, that veiled the future in uncertainty. Forgive me, God, that I have sought to pry beyond the limits that thou thyself hast set! No, no! I will not read!" So saying, she drew hastily back, as if afraid of her own determination—cast open the door, and quitted the apartment.

The Lord of Hannut followed, in some surprise. "Madam," he said, as he offered his hand to guide the Princess through the passages which the want of the torch now rendered totally dark, "I will not say you have done wrong; but you have, I own, surprised me."

"My lord," replied the Princess, "I feel that I have done right, and have not suffered curiosity to triumph over reason.—At least," she added, with a smile, "you can say that there is one woman in the world, who, when the book of destiny was laid open before her, refused to read!"

"It is, indeed, a wonder which may well be noted down," replied the old nobleman; "but, I believe, we have left another behind who may not have the same prudence—Alice." He added aloud,—"Alice! beware! Close the door, fair niece," he added, as the young lady followed; and having seen that it was fastened, he led the way back to the apartments which the Princess was to occupy for the night.

The party they now rejoined were, as may be naturally supposed, full of curiosity, which, however much restrained by respect, was sufficiently apparent; and Mary, whose spirits had risen since her determination had been formed, told them at once, with gay good humour, that she had been afraid to read; "and therefore," she said, "I can tell you nothing of the future—for, thank God! I know nothing."

"I am happy then, madam," said Hugh de Mortmar, "that I can tell you something of the present, which may make up for the disappointment; and what I can tell you is good. A messenger has arrived during your brief absence, bringing news from Lorraine. My lord your father is, as you doubtless know, in the field; and, notwithstanding the checks of Granson and Morat, has an army in better condition than ever. Of all this you are aware: but now you will be glad to hear that Regnier of Lorraine, and all his Switzers, have fled before the Duke, across the Moselle; that Dieulewart, Pont à Mouchon, and Pont, have surrendered to Burgundy; and that the general of the enemy has left his army, and retired to Germany."

Such tidings in regard to the present banished the thoughts of the future, which the preceding events had called up; and the messenger, being summoned to the presence of the Princess, repeated the joyful news he had brought, in a more circumstantial manner; and added the still more important information, in Mary's eyes, that her father was in good health, and had totally shaken off the lethargy of grief into which the defeat at Morat had thrown him for many weeks.

Thus passed the evening of the Princess's stay in the castle of Hannut; and early the next morning, escorted by Hugh de Mortmar and a large body of armed retainers, as well as a party of her own attendants, who had arrived from Tirlemont, she passed through the forest, and proceeded on the visitation which she was making to various cities in the county of Flanders.

In each and all she was received with loud and joyful acclamations; for as both Philip of Commines and good John Molinet observed of their countrymen, the Flemings, they always adored the heirs of the county till they were invested with real authority; but from the moment they succeeded to the sovereignty, they became objects of as much detestation and abuse, as they before were, of love and applause. Thus, as she progressed through the land, Mary fondly fancied that the Flemings had

been a people greatly traduced, and believed that their hearts and best wishes would surely follow a mild and just government. That such, under all circumstances and in every time, should be the character of her own sway, she firmly resolved; and she returned to Ghent, convinced that peace, good will, and union of purpose, would ever reign between her and the honest commons of Flanders.

CHAPTER XVIII.

We must make our narrative of the events which took place in Ghent precede the arrival of the Princess in that city by a few days, as her return did not take place till the evening of the 10th of January, 1477; and it may be necessary to mark particularly some circumstances which occurred on the 8th of that month; premising, however, that the local government had been left in the hands of the Lord of Imbercourt during her absence.

The scene to which we wish to introduce the reader, is a small dark chamber in one of the largest mercantile houses in Ghent, but far removed from the warehouse or the shop, and fitted up with a degree of luxury and elegance only known in Europe, at that time, amongst the great Flemish or Venetian merchants. The walls were hung with rich tapestry; carpets of the same fabric covered the floor. Silver lamps and small round mirrors —then one of the most costly articles of furniture—hung around; and in short, the whole interior of the room presented an aspect of wealth and comfort not to be exceeded by anything of modern days.

At the time I speak of, however, various circumstances combined to show that the apartment was the abode of sorrow. Only one of the lamps was lighted. The cloak and bonnet of a citizen of the time were cast recklessly on the ground, near the door. A small dagger lay upon the table; and, in a seat before it, with his eyes buried in his hands, and his body shaken with convulsive sobs, sat the little druggist, Ganay, displaying that sort of dejected disarray of dress, and careless fall of the limbs, which denotes so strongly that despair has mastered the citadel of hope in the human heart.

From time to time, the sighs and groans which struggled from his bosom, gave way to momentary exclamations—sometimes loud and fierce, sometimes muttered and low. "He was my son," he would exclaim,—"ay, notwithstanding all, he was my son! He had robbed me, it is true—taken my gold—resisted my authority—scoffed at my rebuke—but still my blood poured through his veins;—and to die such a death—by the common hangman!—like a dog!—to hang over the gate of the city, for the ravens to eat him, like the carrion of a horse!" and once more, he gave way to tears and groans.

Then again he would exclaim,—"The fiends! the incarnate fiends!—to slaughter my poor boy like a wolf—to refuse prayers, entreaties, gold!—can they be fathers?—out upon them, cold-hearted tigers!—he has done no more than many a man has done. What though the woman was wronged?—what though her brother was slain in the affray?—Do not these proud nobles do worse every day?—Besides, she should have had gold, oceans of gold;—but now I will have revenge—deep, bitter, insatiable revenge!" and he shook his thin bony hand in the air, while the fire of hell itself seemed gleaming from the bottom of his small dark eyes.

At that moment there was a noise heard without; and the voices of two persons in some degree of contention, as if the one strove to prevent the other from entering, sounded along the passage.

"Out of my way!" cried the one, in a harsh, sharp, grating tone; "I tell you, boy, I must enter; I have business with your master. I enter everywhere, at all times and seasons."

"But don't you know, sir, what has happened?" cried the other voice; "my master is in great affliction, and bade us deny sight of him to every one."

"I know all about it, much better than you do, lad," replied the first. "Out of my way, I say, or I will knock your head against the wall."

The little druggist had started up at the first sounds; and, after gazing upon the door for a moment, with the fierce intensity of the tiger watching his victim before the spring, he seemed to recognise the voice of the speaker who sought to force his way in; and, snatching the dagger hastily from the table, he placed it in his bosom, wiped away the marks of tears from his eyes, and then cast himself back again in his seat.

Almost at the same moment the door opened, and Maillotin du Bac, the prévôt of the Duke of Burgundy, appeared, together with a lad, who seemed to be a serving boy of the druggist's. The prévôt was habited in a different manner, on the present occasion, from that in which we have before depicted him. He was no longer either clad in arms, as he had appeared at the castle of Hannut, or wrapped in bandages, as he had shown himself before the council. His dress was now a rich and costly suit of fine cloth, splendidly embroidered, together with a bonnet of the same colour, in which, as was then very customary amongst the nobles, he wore the brush of a fox, slightly drooping on one side, as it may sometimes be seen in the cap of the successful hunter of the present day. Over his more gaudy apparel, however, he had cast a long black cloak, bordered with sable, which he probably used, in general, on occasions of mourning.

"This person will have entrance," said the youth who accompanied him, addressing the little druggist, "notwithstanding all I can do to prevent him."

"Hinder him not," replied Ganay; "but shut the door, and get thee gone."

The boy readily obeyed the order he received; and Maillotin du Bac, advancing into the room, saluted the druggist with some degree of formal courtesy, not unmixed with that solemnity of aspect wherewith men do reverence to griefs they personally feel but little.

"Health and better cheer to you, Master Ganay!" he said, taking a seat close by the druggist—"health and better cheer to you! This is a sad business, indeed, and I wish to talk over it with you."

The druggist eyed him for a moment or two in bitter silence, while his heavy eyebrows were drawn together till they met, and almost concealed the small piercing eyes beneath.

"You are kind, Sir Prévôt," he said, in a sneering tone; "you are mighty kind; but let me tell you, that were it not that I hear there has been something strange—I know not whether to say friendly—in the conduct that you have pursued through all that is gone, I would soon show you how a man deserves to be treated, who forces himself upon a father on the day of his son's death."

"Why now, Master Ganay, I can bear with you a great deal," replied the Prévôt; "and therefore say what you will, I shall

not be offended: but you very well know, that I would not myself, nor would I suffer any of my men to have anything to do with this bad business, either in regard to the arrest or the execution."

"Murder! call it murder!" cried the druggist, grasping the arm of his chair, with a convulsive motion of his hand.

"Well, murder be it," replied the Prévôt, "though they say they did it all by law. But, however, I did not choose to have anything to do with it; not alone from considering the right or wrong of the matter, but because I had a regard for yourself, and that there are two or three little feelings in common between us."

"Ay, indeed!" cried the druggist; "and what may they be?"

Maillotin du Bac laid his large, strong, bony hand upon the arm of the druggist, and fixing his keen hawk-like eyes upon his face, replied,—"First and foremost—hatred to Imbercourt."

"Ha!" exclaimed the druggist, almost starting from his seat; "how knew you that I hated him?—at least, before this last dark deed?"

"Because," replied Maillotin du Bac, "some ten years ago, when the people of Ghent were pressing boldly round the duke, and shouting for their privileges, I saw this Imbercourt give a contemptuous buffet to a man who had caught him by the robe. Do you remember such a thing? The man was a rich druggist of Ghent; and in his first fury he got a knife half way out of his bosom—not unlike that which lies in your own, Master Ganay—but the moment after he put it up again, as he saw the duke's horsemen riding down; and, with a smooth face and pleasant smile, said to the man who had struck him,—'We shall meet again, fair sir.'"

"Ay, and we have met again—but how?—but how?" cried the druggist, grasping the arm of the Prévôt tight as he spoke; "how have we met again? Not as it should have been—for vengeance on the insolent oppressor;—no; but to go upon my knees before him—to humble myself to the very dust—to drop my tears at his feet—to beseech him to spare my child's life."

"And he spurned you away from him, of course?" replied Maillotin du Bac, eagerly.

"No, no," answered the druggist; "no, no, he did not spurn me,—but he did worse—he pretended to pity me. He

declared that what I asked was not in his power—that he had not pronounced the sentence—that it was the eschevins of the city—and that he had no right nor authority to reverse the judgment. Oh! that I should have been the cursed idiot to have humbled myself before him—to be pitied, to be commiserated by him whose buffet was still burning on my cheek—to be called, poor man! unhappy father!—to be prayed to take some wine, as if I had not the wherewithal to buy it for myself. Out upon them all!—eternal curses light upon their heads, and sink them all to hell!"—and as he spoke, the unhappy man gave way to one of those fearful fits of wrath which had divided his moments, during the whole of that day, with grief as bitter and unavailing.

Maillotin du Bac let the first gust of passion have its way, with that sort of calm indifferent management of the other's grief which showed how familiar his ruthless office had rendered him with every expression of human misery and despair. "Ay," he said, after the tempest had in some degree passed, "it was just like him; a cold calculating person enough he is, and was, and always will be! Much should I like to hear, though, how it happened that he had no power to grant pardon. Did not the princess give him full authority when she went?"

"He said, not! he said not!" cried the druggist, eagerly; "and if he lied, with a father's tears dewing his feet—a father's agony before his eyes—he has purchased a place for himself as deep as Judas in the fiery abyss,—if there be such a place, at least, as monks would have us believe;—would it were true, for his sake!"

"But why did you not pray him," demanded the Prévôt, "to stay the execution till the return of the princess herself? She would have granted you an easy pardon, and your boy's life might have been saved."

"I did, I did," replied the unhappy father; "I did pray—I did beseech—for a day—for an hour; but he would not listen to me. He said that the circumstances of the case would not justify such an action; that the proofs were clear and undoubted; that he—he, my poor luckless boy—had committed an offence heinous in the eyes of God and man; that he had outraged a defenceless woman, and slain a fellow-creature to escape from the punishment of the crime he had committed! Oh! may the time come, that he himself may plead for mercy to ears as deaf

and inexorable! Mark me, Sir Prévôt, mark me! men say lightly that they would give a right hand for some trifling nothing that they covet in this world—some rare jewel, or some painted hood, or some prancing horse; but I would lay down both these old hands, and bid the hangman strike them off—ay, with a smile—for but one hour of sweet revenge."

"If such be the case," replied Maillotin du Bac, in his usual common-place tone ——

"If such be the case?" exclaimed the other, starting up with a new and violent burst of passion: "if such be the case? I tell thee it is, man! Why came you here?—What do you want with me?—Beware how you urge a desperate man!—What seek you?—What offer you?—Do you come to give me revenge? If me no ifs, Sir Prévôt; come you to give revenge?"

"I do!" replied the Prévôt, who had been waiting till the other had run out his hasty exclamations; "I do, Master Ganay, if you can recover your cool tranquillity, and argue some difficult points with me, not forgetting the calm policy with which, I have heard, that you can bend some of your young and inexperienced comrades to your purpose. But recollect yourself—but be determined, collected, and shrewd, and you shall have revenge ——As I am a living man!" he added, seeing the druggist's eyes fix upon him with a look of stern inquiry.

"Then I am calm!" answered the old man; "as calm as the dead. I seek but that one thing—revenge! Thou sayest true, Sir Prévôt; I have been moved—far too much moved.—I, who am wont to stir the minds of others, while I keep my own as tranquil as a still lake, I should not have yielded to such mad despair, but should only have thought how I might repay the mighty debts I owe to some below the moon. Pardon me, and forget what you have seen—but you have never lost a child;—you have never seen your only one given to the butchers. But I am calm, as I said, quite calm; and I will be calmer still. Ho, boy! without there!" and rising from the table, he threw open the door, and rang a small silver hand bell which stood beside him; in answer to the tones of which, the boy who had before presented himself, re-appeared.

"Bring me," said the druggist, "that small box of the precious juice of the Thebaid, which the Venetian merchants sent me, so pure and unadulterated.—Let us be silent till it comes," he added, speaking to the Prévôt; "it will soon quiet all but the

settled purpose. I marvel that I thought not of its virtues before."

The boy returned speedily, bringing a small box of sanders wood, in which—wrapped in innumerable covers, to preserve its virtues—was a quantity of pure opium, from the mass of which the druggist pinched off a small portion, and swallowed it, much to the surprise of Maillotin du Bac, who held all drugs in sovereign abhorrence. However violent might be his passions, Ganay, by the influence of a powerful mind, had acquired such complete command over them, in all ordinary circumstances, that seldom, if ever, had they cast off his control in the course of life. On the present occasion, indeed, despair and mental agony had conquered all for a time: but, even before he had swallowed the opium, he had recovered his rule; and, speedily, as that great narcotic began to exercise its soothing influence upon the irritated fibres of his corporeal frame, the mind acquired still greater ascendency, and he felt no little shame and contempt for himself, on account of the weak burst of frenzied violence to which he had given way in the presence of the Prévôt.

He was too politic, however, when he had regained his self-command, to show that he did contemn the feelings to which he had given way; and he at once prepared to play with Maillotin du Bac the same shrewd and artificial part which he had laid down as the general rule of his behaviour towards mankind.

The two were fairly matched; for the Prévôt was one of those, in whom, a sort of natural instinct, as well as the continual habit of observation, leads to the clear perception of other men's motives, especially where they strive to conceal themselves amongst the dark and tortuous paths of policy. He was, certainly, sometimes wrong in his calculations, but was not often so; and, in the present instance, by placing himself exactly in the situation of the druggist, and conceiving what would have been his own feelings under such circumstances, with a little allowance for the difference of character, he arrived at a very correct conclusion, in regard to the designs and the wishes of his companion, as well as to the obstacles which might impede them from acting together.

One great difficulty, indeed, would have lain in his way on almost any other occasion; for so accustomed was he both to see others attempt to deceive him, and to deceive others himself in return, that he could scarcely deal straight-forwardly with any

one. As he was now perfectly sincere, however, in his desire of aiding the druggist's revenge, or rather of accomplishing his own through that of Ganay, he could afford to be candid on the present occasion. All that obstructed their cordial co-operation arose in those doubts and fears of each other, which all villains, however bold, must naturally feel on leaguing themselves together for an evil purpose; and such doubts and fears were undoubtedly felt strongly by the Prévôt and his companion.

Nevertheless, these difficulties were to be got over. The jealousies and suspicions were soon very frankly avowed; for as each—though with certain modifications—considered cunning or shrewdness as the height of human wisdom, and, consequently, of human virtue, vanity itself naturally taught them to display rather than to conceal the prudent circumspection, with which they guarded against any danger from each other.

We cannot here detail the whole conversation that ensued; but, in the first instance, the druggist made himself master of all the circumstances which acted as incentives to revenge, in the mind of Maillotin du Bac, against the Lord of Imbercourt, before he committed himself further. By many a keen question, he induced him to unveil, step by step, the manner in which, through many years, that nobleman had thwarted his designs, and incurred his displeasure; how he had cut him off from reward and honour, where he had striven for it by dishonourable means; how he had defended the innocent against his persecution; how he had sternly overturned many of his best laid schemes, and exposed some of his most subtle contrivances, from a period long before, up to the day on which his testimony had freed Albert Maurice from the effects of the Prévôt's vindictive hatred. Had there been one defect in the chain,—had not the motive for vengeance been clear and evident,—the doubts of the druggist might have remained unshaken, and he might have conceived that Maillotin du Bac had visited him as a spy, with the design of betraying the schemes of vengeance which his incautious indignation might breathe, to the ears of those who had refused mercy to his child. But the Prévôt, appreciating and revering his suspicions, recapitulated every event with cool, bitter exactness, and dwelt upon the various circumstances with a precision that showed how deeply they were impressed upon his memory. He added, too, a slight glimpse of interested motives, by showing how Imbercourt had stood in the way of his advancement, and

how he might be profited in his own office if that nobleman were removed, by any means, from the councils of Burgundy.

The impression thus left upon the mind of the burgher—and it was a correct one—was, that there was a long store of treasured hatred in the mind of the Prévôt towards this statesman, Imbercourt, aggravated by thwarted ambition and avarice; and that he had reached that point at which he was ready to run considerable risks for the gratification of his vengeance and the promotion of his interest. As to any moral sentiment standing in the way, it was an objection which neither the Prévôt nor the druggist ever dreamed of. Those were ties from which each felt that the other was free, and therefore they were never taken into consideration.

After a long conversation had brought them to this mutual state of good understanding, and after the druggist had pretty plainly pointed out that, before proceeding with any of the deeper and more intricate schemes, which might place the life of each in the power of the other, he should expect that the Prévôt would join with him in some act which, though less dangerous, would give him a hold upon that officer, that at present he did not possess, he went on with the calmness of intense but subdued feelings.

"By the sentence of the eschevins," he said, in a low, quiet tone, which was, perhaps, more impressive than even his former bursts of passion; "by the sentence of the eschevins, Sir Prévôt, the body—you understand me—the body is to hang in chains over the Ypres gate, till such time as it is consumed by the wind, and the rain, and the foul birds of prey;—will it not be sweet for a father's eyes to behold such a sight every time that he rides forth from his own house?"

"Why, truly no, Master Ganay," replied Maillotin du Bac: "good faith, you must take some other road."

"Ay; but would it not be a matter of triumph, rather than shame," asked the druggist, "if I could ride through that gate, and find the body gone? In a word, would it not be proud to show these paltry tyrants that even now they cannot work *all* their will?—What! do you not understand me yet? I would have my son's head laid in the calm ground, man: I would have the body of the thing I loved removed from the place of horror and of shame.—What say you?—can it be done?"

"I understand you now," answered the Prévôt: "let me but

think a moment, Master Ganay,—let me but think a moment. It can be done—ay, it can be done: but I should think it mattered little to one of your firm mind. The body will rot as soon in the holiest ground that ever priest or bishop blest, as in the wide unholy air."

"Do I not know that?" demanded Ganay, with a curling lip. "Think you that I ever dream of angels or devils, or all the absurd fancies that monks and priestly quacks have built up, on the wild vision of an hereafter?—No, no! but I would fain disappoint the tyrants, and teach them that they cannot do all. I would fain, too, remove the memento of my house's shame from before the eyes of my fellow-citizens.—Can it be done, I say?"

"It can—it can!" replied Maillotin du Bac; "and, to please you, it shall be done. Hie you away straight to the churchyard of the Minnims, with some one you can trust bearing pickaxe and shovel. Use my name, and the porter will soon let you in. Wait there till I come, and busy the man you take with you in digging a trench. Be quick; for it will take long. I go upon *my* errand, and will be there in about two hours. After this, Master Ganay, I think we may trust each other. So we will meet again to-morrow night, at this hour; and, if I mistake not, we will soon find means to crush the viper that has stung us both."

The druggist replied not a word, but wrung the hand that the prévot had given him hard in his own, and suffered him to depart.

It were needless to trace further the proceedings of that night, or to give any more detailed explanations in regard to the events just mentioned, than to say, that early the following morning a party of children and women assembled before the Ypres gate, to gaze—with that fondness for strange and fearful sights which often characterizes that age and that sex—upon the body of young Karl Ganay, the rich druggist's son, who, after a short course of wild profligacy and vice, had been hanged for murder the day before. However much they might expect to have their wonder excited, it was so in a greater degree, though in a different manner from that which they anticipated. There, on the projecting beam from which the unhappy young man had been suspended, hung, indeed, the rope which had terminated his existence, and the chains which marked the additional turpitude of his offence; but the body itself was no longer there;

and the tidings of what had occurred soon spread through the city.

Strict search was immediately instituted. The eschevins, and other officers appointed by the Duke of Burgundy, were furious at their authority being set at nought, and both held out threats and offered rewards for the discovery of the body. But it was all in vain: and while some of the more malevolent—remembering the course of young Ganay's life, and into the hands of what Being it had appeared likely to cast him in the end—accounted for the disappearance of his body, by supposing that the great enemy of mankind had carried it off as his due, others, more charitable, but not less superstitious, chose to believe that the father, by some drugs only known to himself, had found means to resuscitate his son, and had sent him away to some distant land, where his crimes and their punishment were equally unknown.

This version of the affair, indeed, obtained by far the most numerous body of supporters; and the tale, swollen and disfigured by tradition, is still to be heard at the firesides of the citizens of Ghent.

CHAPTER XIX.

Other matters of more general interest occurred soon after the events we have narrated in the last chapter, and imperatively called the attention of the citizens of Ghent from the unhappy druggist and his son. Strange rumours of a battle fought and lost beneath the walls of Nancy, circulated in the good town during the evening of the ninth of January. No one, however, could trace them to their source. No messenger had arrived in the city from the army of the Duke of Burgundy; and the wise and prudent amongst the citizens, after a few inquiries concerning the authority on which these reports rested, rejected them as false and malicious.

They were borne, however, in the evening, by Maillotin du Bac, to the ears of the druggist Ganay; and the chance of such an event was eagerly canvassed between them, as well as the course of action to be pursued in case the tidings should prove

true; which, as they calculated all the probabilities, and suffered their wishes in some degree to lead their judgments, they gradually persuaded themselves was even more than likely.

Long and anxious were their deliberations; and it was verging fast towards the hour of three in the morning when the Prévôt left the dwelling of the rich merchant. It was a clear, frosty night, with the bright small stars twinkling in thousands through a sky from which every drop of vapour and moisture seemed frozen away by the intense cold. The world was all asleep; and the sound of a footfall in the vacant streets was enough to make even the journeyer himself start at the noise his step produced, so still and silent was the whole scene. The sinking moon, though she still silvered over with her beams the frost-work on the high roofs of the various buildings, and poured a flood of mellow splendour down the long streets that led to the westward, cast the broad shadows of the principal buildings completely over all the other parts of the town, leaving no light but that which was diffused through the whole air by the general brightness of the sky, and its glistening reflection from the thin film of ice upon the canals.

There is always something sublime and touching in the aspect of a large city sleeping calmly in the moonlight of a clear quiet night, with all its congregated thousands reposing beneath the good providence of God. But the mind of Maillotin du Bac had reached that point of obduracy at which the sweetest or the most solemn, the most refreshing or the most awful of the pages in Nature's great monitory book are equally unheeded. Wrapping his cloak round him, to guard against the cold, he walked on, close to the houses, and turned into the first small narrow alley that he found, in order that no watchful eye, if such existed, might trace him from the house of the druggist. Thence, again deviating into one of those lateral streets that lead along by the side of the principal ones, he continued his course over the stones, rendered black and slippery by the intense frost.

All was still. Not a sound fell upon the ear, except every now and then the distant crowing of a cock heard through the clear air from the country beyond the walls. After a little, however, as the Prévôt walked on, he caught the tramp of a horse's feet sounding afar off, and, in a few minutes, the challenge of the sentries at the Alost gate, the clang of the portcullis, the fall of the drawbridge, a brief murmured conversation at the gate,

and then again the sound of the horse's feet advancing at the slow pace, which the state of the pavement rendered necessary, down the principal street. All this he heard clearly and distinctly; for the sound must have been small, indeed, which, in the calm still winter air of the night, did not reach his practised ear.

He was now too far from the house of the druggist for his appearance in the streets, even at that late hour, to lead to any suspicion of their connexion, especially as his official duties were always a fair excuse for conduct that in other men might have led to doubt and question. At the same time the very habits of his life gave him a propensity to investigate every occurrence, however slight, so that the sound of some one entering the city, at such an hour of the night, instantly attracted his attention, and his curiosity at once led him to take a short cut into the street down which the horseman was riding. It was one of those which, running nearly east and west, was still illumined by the pale light of the moon; and the eye of Maillotin du Bac, which never forgot the form that it had once rested upon, instantly perceived and recognised an armed cavalier riding towards him, whom he had known as a boon companion in the army of the Duke of Burgundy.

His resolution was instantly taken to accost him; and, stepping out of the shadow, as the cavalier approached, he exclaimed, "Why, how now! What news, Paul Verdun? How long have you left the camp?"

"Who the devil art thou?" was the first reply of the cavalier, who appeared to have drank more wine than was beneficial to his faculties of perception:—"Who the devil art thou?—What! Master Prévôt?—give you good day—give you good day—night, that is to say: or day it may be, too; for, by my faith, it is after cock-crow. What! going your rounds?—Ever watchful, Master Prévôt, eh?—What news of the good city?"

"Nothing stirring—nothing stirring," replied Maillotin du Bac: "no news at all, except that the eschevins hanged a man yesterday, without my help. But what news of the camp, I say; and how came you from it?"

"Ay, there is the mischief," said the soldier.

"What! no new defeat?" interrupted Maillotin du Bac, his wish, very likely, being father to the thought.

"Defeat! No, no,—no defeat, man!" answered the soldier:

"never were we better. A glorious army—posted strongly,—the town almost reduced by famine, and nothing but a handful of raw Switzers come to relieve it. There will be a battle before many days are over; and Duke Charles will cut up the churls like mincemeat. But the mischief is, that I should be sent away before it is fought."

"So, then, there has been no battle after all!" exclaimed the Prévôt.—"Well, God send it a good issue, when it does come.—Good night, good friend: I must on upon my way."

"Good night!—good night!" replied the soldier:—"faith, I must on my way, too; for I have letters from the Duke, and from the Count de Chimay, for my good Lord of Imbercourt; and, somehow, I met with three good companions at Alost, who wasted my time over their cursed pottle-pots. Good night!—good night!" and so saying, he rode on.

"Ha!" said the Prévôt to himself, as he walked onward towards his own dwelling; "so—that scheme is all vain, and we must try the other, though it will be both difficult and dangerous to get any one to give him the dose. I had rather that it had been something public, too, if it had but been to wring his pride."

Thus muttering as he went, the Prévôt now trod his way homeward. The soldier and his war-horse were admitted into the court of the Lord of Imbercourt's hotel. The streets of Ghent resumed their solitude and silence; and the night between the ninth and tenth of January ended in peace.

No small activity was observable, however, the next morning in the precincts of the court. By seven o'clock the Lord of Imbercourt was on horseback, and proceeding towards the palace, at which Margaret Duchess of Burgundy, and sister to Edward IV. of England, had arrived the day before. The Princess Mary, too, was expected from the side of Bruges. But, nevertheless, two messengers were sent off, at different times, in that direction; and it was supposed that they bore her the intelligence of an approaching battle, and recommended her immediate return to the city.

The news which had been brought by Paul Verdun, and the certainty that, at the time of his departure from the Burgundian camp, no battle had been fought, spread rapidly amongst the citizens, and was received by every different individual with different feelings, as he was well or ill affected to the reigning family. The certainty, however, that an immediate struggle was

about to take place between Charles the Bold and his determined and hitherto successful adversaries, the Swiss, of course kept the minds of the people of the city in a state of agitation and excitement, — a state the most detrimental, morally and physically, that it is possible to conceive for any town or any people. Business was neglected, if not suspended; political gossipings supplied the room of activity and industry; anxiety, suspicion, and irritation took the place of calm labour and tranquil enjoyment; the slightest piece of news, whether false or true, was sought and received as a boon; the wildest tale found some to believe it; and a small lie, by the industrious augmentation of many, soon swelled into a mountain of falsehood.

Towards evening the Princess Mary arrived at the palace; and while the good people of Ghent proceeded to distort amongst themselves the news of her return in every different way that suited their fancies—some saying that she had come back with only a single squire, some that she had brought with her a force of a thousand men-at-arms—that fair girl herself, after dismounting in the court-yard, together with exactly the same train which had accompanied her during the whole course of her progress, ran lightly up the wide flight of steps which conducted to the apartments of her amiable stepdame, and in a moment after was in the arms of Margaret of York.

"Bless thee, my sweet child! bless thee!" said the fair Englishwoman, pressing her husband's daughter to her bosom: "thou art come to comfort me; for I am very sad, and my heart is full of forebodings."

"Nay, nay, madam, never fear," replied the Princess; "you are sad and anxious because you know my lord and father is likely to risk a battle,—and I, of course, am anxious, too; but still we must not despond. Remember, madam, how often he has fought and conquered."

"It is not for the battle that I fear," replied Margaret of York: "my early days, and my early recollections, have been, and are, of nothing but stricken fields, and battles lost and won; and the tidings of approaching strife would give me no apprehensions, did not those who are on the spot breathe doubts and suspicions which have sadly shaken my hopes, dear Mary. In a word, with the duke's letters, received last night, came a despatch to the good Lord of Imbercourt from the Count de Chimay. He speaks vaguely and doubtingly; but he evidently

apprehends treason, and as evidently points to Campo Basso as the traitor,—your father's most trusted and favourite servant."

"I would fain see the letters," replied the Princess: "may I beseech you, madam, to let the Lord of Imbercourt be sent for?"

The desire of the Princess was immediately obeyed; and in a short time, Imbercourt returned to the palace. His words were few, and tended merely to express his congratulations on the Princess's safe return, without touching upon the fears which had been more openly spoken by the Duchess of Burgundy. There was, however, a degree of settled gloom upon his countenance, and a restless anxiety in his eye, which showed that his apprehensions were perhaps greater even than her own. He immediately laid before the Princess Mary the letters which he had received the night before, and which, as far as positive fact went, merely stated that the Burgundian army, in great force, lay in a strong position beneath the walls of Nancy; that a small army of Swiss and Germans were encamped opposite to them, and that a battle was likely soon to take place. The duke's letter was short and general: that of the Count de Chimay was more particular; and Mary read over both with deep and eager attention.

"There is much matter for fear," she said, as she laid them down, "in both these despatches. May God defend us, and avert the dangers that threaten!"

"That there is much to raise apprehension in the letter of Monsieur de Chimay, I acknowledge, madam," replied the Lord of Imbercourt; "but I see nothing in that of our noble sovereign the Duke which should give us any alarm."

Mary raised her eyes with a timid glance towards the face of Margaret of York, as if fearful of causing her pain, or of increasing her alarm. But the Duchess instantly perceived her hesitation, and exclaimed,—"Speak, speak, dear Mary! let us not have a thought concealed from each other."

"Well, then," replied Mary, the tears starting in her eyes—"I must say I see more—far more—cause for apprehension in *this* letter than in *this*," and she laid her hand first upon the letter of her father, and then upon that of the Count de Chimay. "The one," she proceeded, "speaks vaguely of traitors to be feared in my father's camp; the other shows me much cause to fear for my father himself.—O, my lord!" she added, laying her left hand upon the arm of Imbercourt, while, with her right, she

pointed to a number of blots and erasures, sentences begun and not finished, or phrases entirely altered, in the despatch from her father:—"O, my lord! do you not see a great alteration here? The time was when the brief, clear sentences of Charles of Burgundy, unstudied and rough though they might sometimes be, proceeded at once to the point, without change or hesitation, and expressed with force and precision the exact meaning, which was too distinct in his mind, ever to be doubtful in his words: but look at that letter, my lord,—Did you ever see anything like that from the hand of the Duke before?"

Imbercourt was silent, and gazed upon the paper with a stern and mournful glance.

"My lord, my lord!" continued Mary, "my father is ill; and, with Heaven's blessing, I will set out to-morrow to see him and console him."

"Nay, lady," replied Imbercourt, "you must not forget that you are left here by our sovereign lord, as his representative in Flanders; and indeed you must not quit your post. Before you could arrive, too, a battle will have been fought. I will yet trust that the noble duke will win it gloriously:—and you know him too well to doubt," he added, with a faint smile, "that a battle won will do more to console him, than the sweetest voice that ever whispered comfort in the ear of man."

"I do indeed,—I do indeed!" replied Mary; but no smile accompanied her words; for that truth had been often felt too bitterly during the course of her past life.—"I do indeed; but yet the only thing that can detain me here while my father, ill at ease, and shaken both in body and mind, lies in his weary leaguer before Nancy, is the doubt which is the superior duty—to join him there, or to remain in the situation in which he has placed me."

"Nay, nay, Mary," said Margaret of York; "your duty binds you to stay here, and mine calls me hence. You can trust my love for both your father and yourself; and, as soon as may be, I will join him, though haply my coming unbidden, may call on me some harsh words, as when last I saw him at Dijon."

"Bear with him, dear lady! oh, bear with him!" exclaimed Mary.—"It is but the haste of an impatient spirit chafed by unwonted reverses. He knows the worth of your love too well to chide with any bitterness. But hark!" she proceeded,—"what noise is that in the court? For God's sake, my Lord of

Imbercourt, look out and see! for since I took upon me the sad task of holding the reins, which require a far stronger hand than mine, I have met with so many sorrows and misfortunes, that every sound alarms me.—Hark! there are many people speaking."

In obedience to her command, Imbercourt approached the casement which opened above the lesser court of the palace, and, throwing back a part of the lattice, he looked out upon what was passing below. The first object that his eyes fell upon was the form of the old Lord of Neufchâtel, in the act of dismounting from his horse by the aid of two stout attendants, whose dusty armour and jaded horses evinced that they, like their master, had travelled far and fast. The old nobleman himself, however, displayed strong traces of battle as well as wayfaring. His helmet was off, and its place supplied by a small furred cap, from underneath which, a mingled mass of bandages and long gray hair, dabbled with dust and blood, made its appearance; while his left arm, supported in a torn and soiled scarf, showed that the fight had been severe ere he left it.

Imbercourt at once guessed the event which he had come to communicate, well knowing that an aged and wounded cavalier would not have been chosen as the messenger of victory: and while, with slow and painful efforts, the old lord dismounted, the counsellor withdrew from the window, doubting whether he should meet him on the stairs, and delay the tidings that he bore, till Mary was more prepared to receive them, or whether he should suffer him to see the Princess, and let the shock pass over at once. His course, however, was determined by Mary herself, who marked the conflict in his mind by the changing expression of his countenance.

"What is it, my lord?" she exclaimed; "speak boldly!—Are they again in revolt?"

"Who, madam?—the men of Ghent?" demanded Imbercourt. —"Oh! no, no! nothing of the kind. It is apparently a wounded officer bearing news from the army; and I fear——"

Mary waved her hand,—"Bid him hither!—quick!" she cried.—"Suspense is worse than any tidings. Quick, my lord! Bid him hither, without pause of idle ceremony."

Imbercourt withdrew to obey; and while Mary gazed with eager eyes upon the door, Margaret of York fixed her glance with melancholy interest on her fair step-daughter, more anxious for Mary of Burgundy—in whom she had found as much affection

as she could have expected from a child of her own bosom—than even for a husband, who had never greatly sought her love, and who had neglected her as soon as he found that she was destined to be childless. But a short time elapsed between the Lord of Imbercourt's departure and his return; but moments of apprehension would weigh down many long days of joy: and to Mary of Burgundy his absence seemed interminable. At length, however, he came, followed slowly by the old Lord of Neufchâtel, unable, from wounds, and weariness, and exhaustion, to walk without the support of several attendants.

Even anxiety conquered not the gentleness of Mary's heart; and though she began by exclaiming, as he entered, "Well, my lord! Speak!" she instantly paused, and continued,—"Good Heaven! you are sadly wounded, sir. Bring forward that chair; send for the chirurgeon of the household. Sit you down, my Lord of Neufchâtel! How fare you now?"

"Better than many a better man, madam," replied the old knight, more full of the disastrous tidings he bore, than even of his corporeal sufferings; "many a one lies cold that could fill the saddle now-a-days far better than old Thibalt of Neufchâtel."

"Good God! then, what are your tidings?" cried Mary, clasping her hands. "My father?—speak, sir!—my father?"

"Is well, I hope, lady," answered the old soldier; "but as for his army——"

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed the Princess; "first, thank God for that! But are you sure, my lord, that he is safe?"

"Nay, nay, I cannot vouch it, lady," he replied; "his army, however, is no more. Fatal, most fatal, has been the duke's determination. All is lost in the field. The army of Burgundy is, as I have said, no more; and where the duke is, I cannot say, though I saw him galloping towards the left when I quitted the field, which was not amongst the first.—Ah! had he but taken my advice!" he added, with a rueful shake of the head; a slight touch of natural vanity obtruding itself, even then, in the midst of sincere grief of mind, and pain, and exhaustion of body—"Ah! had he but taken my advice, and not that of either the black traitor, Campo Basso, or of Chimay, and such boys as that! But, lady, I am faint and weary, for I have ridden harder to bear you these news, though they be sad ones, and to bid you prepare all sorts of reinforcements to check the enemy, than ever I thought to ride from a field of battle."

"But tell me, my lord," said Margaret of York, stepping forward, as Mary, overwhelmed with the tidings, sat gazing, mournfully, in the face of the old soldier, while her mind was afar; "but tell me, my lord, how all this has happened. Speak, for I have a right to hear; and my ear, alas! has been, from the cradle, too much accustomed to the details of battle and bloodshed, for my cheek to blanch or my heart to fail. Say, how went this luckless day?"

"Faith, good madam, I must be short with my tale," replied the Lord of Neufchâtel, "for I know not how, but my breath fails me.—My lord the duke—God send him safe to Ghent!—had sworn by all the saints, that no house of stone should ever cover his head till he had slept in Nancy, which, as you know, we had besieged some days. The enemy, in the meanwhile, lay over the water a league or two beyond St. Nicholas, and day by day increased in number, while day by day the forces of the duke fell off; for we had famine and disease, and—worse than all—traitors in the camp. But his Grace would not be warned, though many a one strove to warn him; and at length, on the Sunday morning, just five days since, the Swiss and Lorrainers, with their German and French allies and Italian traitors, marched boldly up towards our camp. Faith! it was a fair sight to see them come in two great bodies—one by the river, and the other by the high road from Neufville. Churls though they were, they made a gallant array. So then they came on.—But, madam," he added, rising and supporting himself by the back of the chair, "I love not to think of it! Good sooth, it makes my heart swell too much to tell the whole just now.—We were soon hand to hand—the artillery roaring, bolts and arrows and balls flying, the trumpets braying, and the men-at-arms charging gallantly. But still, as I looked round, I saw the ranks of Burgundy wax thin; and still the Swiss churls pushed on; and I beheld many a stout soldier fall, and many that had fought well turn his back. Well, as I was thinking what might best be done, my lord the duke rode up; and, speaking softly as a woman, he said,—'My good old friend, I pray you join De Lalaing, and, with your men-at-arms, make one good charge upon the flank of yonder boors.' It was soon done and over. We went down like the shot of a mangonel, but we were driven back like the same shot when it bounds off from a wall of stone. One churl shivered my helmet, and nearly split my skull with his two-handed sword.

Another shot me in the arm with his hand-gun. All my poor fellows but two or three died around me bravely; and they who were left took my horse by the bridle, and were carrying me off, when, by our Lady, I saw one of the base Italians who had betrayed us all, despatching my poor Squire Walter as he lay tumbled from his horse upon a little mound. He had served with me in nine stricken fields, and many a chance affray; he had never quitted me for well nigh twenty years, so I could not quit him then. No, lady, no! but shaking the bridle from their hands that would have stayed me, I turned me round, and struck one more good stroke for Burgundy. But the poor lad was dead!—God have his soul—the poor lad was dead!" and as he spoke, the old knight dashed the tear from his eye with the back of his brown hand.

"Little is there more to tell, madam," he proceeded, after a moment's pause. "By this time the battle had changed to a flight and a pursuit. There were not ten men who held together on the field. Shame to him who turns his back while one hope lasts; but no shame to him who flies from a lost field. I saw the duke galloping to the left; and as I knew the country well, I spurred for the bridge of La Buissière, and sad it was to see the road all strewed with dead and dying. But when I came near the bridge, the matter was still worse, for there was that foul traitor, Campo* Basso, with a barricade of carts and wagons, cutting off the fugitives from his betrayed master's host. When I looked forward, there were the Italian devils—when I looked behind, down were coming the German swine. On the one hand was the hill, with the Swiss pikes gleaming over the top, and on the other was the river. The water afforded the only chance; so in we plunged. Our horses were strong and unwounded, and we struggled through, though many a gallant gentleman sunk close before our eyes. But, lady," he added, once more, as the excitement of detailing the battle passed away, "I am growing faint again, and in good sooth I have little more to tell; therefore, by your Grace's leave, I will retire."

Mary answered not a word, but gazed upon the old man with

* This fact is undoubted, and indeed the whole account of the battle of Nancy here given is confirmed by Jean Molinet, Historiographer to Mary of Burgundy. The writer of this book, however, would have omitted this narration of events, which have been so admirably detailed elsewhere, had it not been absolutely necessary to his story.

the same fixed painful glance; but the Duchess bowed her head, and the Lord of Neufchâtel, with the aid of his two attendants, moved towards the door.

Before he reached it, however, he paused, and turning round exclaimed—"Faith! I had forgot the very errand which made me make such haste; for I have travelled with scarcely an hour's rest, in order to bid you take instant measures to secure the country, for that wild young wolf of Lorraine will be upon the frontier speedily; and even as I passed by Brussels I heard strange tales of movements in France. You, my Lord of Imbercourt, look to it with all speed; for, believe me, not an hour is to be lost."

Thus saying, he turned and left the chamber, while Imbercourt advanced to the Princess, and besought her to be comforted. She answered nothing, however; and only by a melancholy wave of the hand, expressed how deep were her apprehensions.

"Nay, Mary, my sweet child," said the Duchess, "give not way to despair: remember, there is a God of mercy above us, who sees all, and rules all, for the best."

Mary of Burgundy cast her fair arms round her stepmother, and exclaiming, "My father! oh, my father!" burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Leave us, my Lord of Imbercourt," said the Duchess. "Let me beseech you to take all the measures necessary for our security; and send out messengers to gain more intelligence of this sad defeat. Call those whom you can best trust to council; and, for God's sake, suffer not your mind to be overcome at the moment that all its energies are most required."

Imbercourt bowed and withdrew: but there were circumstances in the situation of the country which rendered it impossible for him to act or think with that calm tranquillity which he had displayed at other times. A deep and heavy gloom fell over him from the first moment that the loss of the fatal battle of Nancy met his ear; and he never seemed wholly to recover his former energies.

He took care, however, to summon to the side of the Princess, in her hour of need, all those who, he thought, might give her both consolation and support. Messengers were instantly despatched to the Lord of Ravestein, the Duke of Cleves, the Bishop of Liege, and several others, whose relationship to the house of Burgundy afforded the best security for their taking an

interest in its fate; and Imbercourt endeavoured, as far as possible, to increase the military force within the town of Ghent, without exciting the watchful jealousy of the inhabitants; but the country was totally drained of men, and few, if any, could be added at a short notice to the force within the town—at least, few of those feudal troops on which alone reliance could be placed.

In the meanwhile, during the evening and the early part of the night which followed the arrival of the Lord of Neufchâtel, post after post came in from the side of Alost and Brussels, bringing new details and rumours of the battle; and each additional fact proved it to have been more disastrous and bloody than it had appeared at first. Nothing was heard but long lists of the dead, or exaggerated computations of the total loss. Still, there was a deep silence in regard to the duke himself. No one knew what had befallen him in the fight or the pursuit; and no one ventured to assert, what all internally believed, that he had fallen upon that bloody plain. The very silence, however, was ominous; and the whole of the inmates of the ducal dwelling in Ghent passed the night in that gloomy apprehension, which is perhaps more racking to the heart than absolute sorrow.

Mary wept her father as dead; but yet she insisted upon hearing the tidings that every courier brought in, with that anxious eagerness which showed that a spark of hope, however faint, still remained alive within her bosom; but with her, and indeed with every one else, as fresh news arrived, as the accounts of the stern determination evinced by the duke before the battle were multiplied, and as his often reiterated declaration that he would never quit the field alive, was repeated, the conviction of his death became more and more complete.

In the meanwhile, the people of the city, collecting in eager and anxious crowds in the streets, especially towards the Brussels gate, canvassed in low tones the events that had taken place. As one horseman after another entered the town, still some individual would start out to accost him, and running by his side as he rode on, would gather from him whatever information he would afford, and then return to tell it to the groups, whose comments on the past were seldom unconnected with some of those whispered apprehensions for the future, which, like the low moanings of the rising wind, generally give notice of a coming storm long before it is ready to fall upon the earth.

CHAPTER XX.

It was remarked as an extraordinary fact, that during the whole course of that evening,—an evening of the greatest excitement and anxiety, perhaps, that Ghent had ever known,—not one of the principal and most influential citizens was seen in the streets of the city. The groups which collected were altogether of the lower classes; and those amongst them who were supposed to be the most knowing in the policy of the higher burghers, could discover no other sign of interest and agitation on their part, than was afforded by the sight of one of the serving-men of Albert Maurice calling rapidly at the houses of five or six of the principal merchants, amongst whom the druggist Ganay was the first.

Gradually, as the evening closed in, the crowds began to disperse—a considerable number returning home early, to discuss with their wives and families the news they had collected in the town, and to acquire that degree of domestic importance which a budget of strange tidings is always sure to impart to the bearer. One after another, the diminishing groups thus separated at length—the wind, which was intensely cold, though symptoms of a thaw had begun to manifest themselves, driving even the most persevering to the shelter of their own homes, as the night advanced—and only one or two idle young men, who could boast some acquaintance with the soldiers on guard at the Brussels gate, remained after nine o'clock within the warm refuge of the guard-house, waiting for any tidings that might still arrive.

The many varied scenes, the continued presence of danger, the frequent breaking short of ties and affections, have all a natural tendency to render the heart of an old soldier, in some degree, callous and indifferent to events which agitate and affect younger and fresher minded men. It was wonderful to hear with what calm composure the veterans in the guard-house talked over the events which had spread grief and dismay through the palace, and excitement and alarm in the city. Although they all loved and admired the character of Charles the Bold, for the very lion-hearted qualities which had led him to attempt impossible enterprises, and to rush upon certain defeat, yet they canvassed his conduct with calm and somewhat contemptuous

examination, and spoke of his probable death in the same terms that they might be supposed to use in talking of a hound which had been gored by the boar.

"Why the devil did he sit down before Nancy, in the middle of winter?" cried one; "he might have known very well that nobody would stay with him, looking at stone walls, in a frost like this."

"Ay, ay, but he did worse than that!" replied another: "why did he trust to a set of Italian hirelings, when he had good subjects of his own?"

"Why, old lions," rejoined a third, "will, they say, grow both suspicious and obstinate."

"Full time, then, that they should get their throats cut," answered the first: "but I know old Charlie well; and I will bet a flagon of Beaune to a flask of sour Rhenish, that he never left the field of Nancy. No, no; he had had enough of running away; and sure I am that he died like a stag at bay. Well, I am almost sorry that I was not with him, though a warm guard-house and a pottle-pot are better, at any time, in a January night, than the cold ground and a bloody nightcap. Hie thee over, Bon-temps, to the vintner's at the corner, and fill the flagon with the best thou canst get for that broad piece. By my faith! we will have a carouse to the old Lion of Burgundy, be he living or dead, and then we will go sleep.—Hie thee over, while I undo the gate, for there is some one blowing his horn,—a new post from Alost, bringing more news, I warrant."

While one soldier, according to the request of the other, ran across the street to seek matter for the potations with which they proposed to conclude the night, his senior proceeded to the gate, where, the portcullis being raised, and the drawbridge let down, a cavalier immediately rode in, whom he addressed with,—"Ha! Master Prévôt; you can never have gone as far as Alost since you rode out."

"By my faith! I have, though," replied Maillotin du Bac; "look at my beast,—he is steaming like a quagmire with hard riding."

"Well, what news?—what news?" cried the other,—"you must have heard some tidings."

"Nothing new at all," replied the Prévôt: "all is stale as a miser's cheese;—a battle fought and lost; men dead, but not buried; the army dispersed, and every one gone Heaven knows

where.—Good night, good night!" and so saying, he rode on. But it is remarkable, that though his horse was evidently ready to drop with fatigue, he did not, at first, take his way towards his own dwelling, but directed his course towards the house of the little druggist Ganay.

In the meantime the soldiers in the guard-house discussed the contents of the flagon, with which their messenger returned; sharing it liberally with the two or three young artisans whom they had permitted to remain at their post. With what had been drunk before, the contents of the gallon pot which was now brought over was sufficient—notwithstanding the fact of its being shared with the citizens—to obfuscate, in some degree, the intellects of the soldiery; and, after having given their civil companions a somewhat unceremonious notice to go home, they cast themselves down upon the straw which was provided for their accommodation during the night, and soon forgot everything else, under the influence of the drowsy god. The sentry without, who had been ordered to watch well, of course felt a greater inclination to sleep than ordinary, which was increased by the cold; and, in spite of various vigorous efforts to keep himself awake, by walking rapidly up and down, dropping the end of his partisan upon the ground, and several other little experiments of the same kind, he found himself, from time to time, nodding most refreshingly under the shelter of the high arch which spanned over the gate.

How long this state of things had continued none of the soldiers knew, when suddenly the sentry was woke by his weapon being snatched hastily from his hands; and, on shaking off the slumber which oppressed him, he found himself pinioned by a number of powerful men, while a stern voice, backed by a naked sword at his throat, commanded him to be silent on pain of death. Faithful, in this instance at least to his duty, without a moment's consideration, the soldier shouted loudly,—"To arms! to arms!" But he was instantly thrown down and tied by those who held him, while a number of others made their way into the guard-house. The soldiers there were already upon their feet; and the captain of the watch was starting forward to light the match of his arquebuse at the lantern which hung against the wall, when a powerful man, rushing in, closed with him, and, throwing him violently back, interposed between him and the light. A dozen more persons, completely armed, poured into

the building; and more than one stern voice commanded the four soldiers which it contained to lay down their arms at once.

"Who, in the fiend's name, are you, my masters?" exclaimed the captain of the watch: "let us hear that, before we put down our arms, at all events:" and while he spoke he made impatient signs to one of his companions to get out of the small window, and give the alarm: but this scheme was frustrated by the same tall, powerful figure which had before prevented him from lighting his match.

"We are the officers of the burgher guard of Ghent," replied the stranger, "whose incontestable right and privilege it has been, in all ages, to mount guard on the walls and at the gate of our own city; which privilege, though it was usurped from us by the Duke Charles, is no less valid than before that act. Give up your arms, then, quietly, and no harm shall befall you."

"Before we do that, good sir," answered the captain of the watch, "we must have authority from our superior officers. As you well know, the commander for the night is at the Ypres gate; send to him, and we will obey his commands."

"You seek, sir, to gain time," said the other; "but it is in vain. The walls and the gates are now in our hands. Our sentinels are mounted everywhere; and each military post which had been unlawfully placed by the Duke of Burgundy, throughout the city of Ghent, has been disarmed before we came hither. Yield, therefore, with a good grace, for yield you must; and as no blood has been shed already, pity it were to begin now."

"Well, sir!—well!" replied the captain of the watch: "you say right in that, at least; though I should be willing enough to shed blood of my own, or of other men, could it prove of service. But four can hardly cope with twenty; therefore, ground your arms, my lads, and give them up. We are your prisoners, sir."

"You have done wisely, soldier," said Albert Maurice, for he it was who spoke;—"take their arms, my friends, but suffer them to pass freely out. As our fellow-citizens arrive, let all the posts be doubled. Now, good Master Ganay," he added in a whisper, "gather together the men we named, and join me quickly at my house. It wants but four hours to daybreak; and ere the sun rises, we have as much to do as would take lazy statesmen full many a month. I go round by the western magazine, to secure, if possible, the stores and artillery. But be quick, for *now* despatch is everything."

The purpose of Albert Maurice was accomplished without difficulty. The magazine was but scantily guarded; and the sleeping soldiers were surprised at that post as easily, as the others had been at the guard-houses. The gates, the defences, and all the principal military stations, were now in the hands of the people; and Albert Maurice hastened home to meet a number of individuals, selected from the most influential citizens, on whose consent, and with whose aid, he proposed to assert the ancient privileges of the city of Ghent, as the first step to those grander plans of general emancipation, which yet remained but vague and undefined even in his own mind.

So rapid had been the determination and the movements of the young citizen through all that night—so prompt and successful all his measures—that even Ganay, stirred up by revenge and hatred, and guided by consummate cunning and shrewdness, had been left far behind. Where he had expected to be obliged to urge and suggest, he found himself at once compelled to follow and obey; and, yielding readily to a mind that he felt to be far superior, he had been hurried through a series of actions in a few hours, which he had contemplated before, indeed, but which he had contemplated as the work of many days, and long and difficult intrigues.

Between ten at night and three in the morning, the young citizen had received, from the druggist himself, the certainty of the Duke of Burgundy's death, which had been obtained by the prévôt,—had formed his determination at once—had arranged his plans with prompt decision—had assembled the ancient burgher guard in force in his court-yard—by a few brief and striking words had explained to them his views and his schemes—had carried all voices in his favour; and, finally, had seized every military post in the town, except the palace, without bloodshed, while the regular soldiery had everywhere been surprised and disarmed.

His last effort upon the magazine, the one of the greatest importance, had been effected, as sometimes happens, with more ease, than attempts which had seemed less difficult; and, leaving the citizens, who had accompanied him, to guard that post, he hastened home through the solitary streets, not a little rejoiced to find, by the stillness of the whole city, that the silence and caution which had been enjoined in the first instance were still preserved. No one had arrived when he again crossed the

threshold of his own door; and whispering a few hasty orders to the servant who admitted him, in regard to saddling horses, and preparing trustworthy messengers, he entered the chamber where he was about to meet his fellow-citizens, and casting himself back in a chair, covered his eyes with his hand, and abandoned himself, for a moment, to deep thought. More than one pang crossed his heart, as he contemplated the future; but he smothered them instantly: and, banishing regret, he directed the whole powers of his mind to consider the best means for obtaining that object for which he had now irrevocably determined to struggle.

So deep, so intense was the meditation to which he yielded himself, that Ganay and several others entered the apartment without his perceiving their presence; and it was only the voice of the druggist, demanding if he slept, that roused him from his reverie.

"Sleep!" he exclaimed, starting up; "no, no! Who could sleep on such a night as this? Welcome, my friends, welcome! Each sit down, I pray: others will soon be here; but it is not fitting that of the few hours which are given us for action, even one minute should be wasted in waiting for any man. Some things need long counsel; in others, little can be risked. Let us choose those first that are most easily determined. Citizens of Ghent! are you not resolved to recover the liberties and privileges which have been torn from you by the unholy hand of power?"

"We are! We are!" replied a number of stern voices around.

"Is it not requisite, then," continued Albert Maurice, "that you should call your brethren of the other good towns of Flanders and Brabant to join with and support you, in asserting the rights of all?"

"Beyond all doubt! Let it be done!" was the answer.

"Well, then, by this time," said the young citizen, "four strong horses stand saddled, ready to set out; and four trustworthy messengers are prepared to bear to Brussels, Ypres, Bruges, and Louvain, our request that the worthy burghers of those great towns will send us deputies to give force to our proceedings. My letters, written nearly six months ago, when the battle of Morat was lost and won, have prepared them to do so at a moment's warning. The gates are now in our own hands; shall the messengers set out?"

"The sooner they depart the better!" replied the rest; and a few lines, hastily penned to each of the cities, were despatched without farther delay.

Before all this was completed, a number of other citizens had arrived; and the chamber was almost full. Everywhere were to be seen men with faces pale from anxiety and excitement: some armed in hasty guise, with such armour as could be caught up in a moment; some with their night gear scarcely laid aside; and each, as he entered, gazing round upon the rest, with half wild and somewhat fearful glances, as the light of the lamps dazzled their eyes, on entering from the dark streets without. Gradually, however, as they beheld a number of friends and acquaintances all gathered together in the same cause as themselves, the boldness which men derive from union began to spread amongst them. Every one present had long before been prepared, in some degree, for such events as were now taking place; and, while they had been taught to look to Albert Maurice as the man from whose voice and conduct the rest of the citizens were likely to take their tone, he had taken care to ascertain the sentiments of each individual, whom he now called to consult with him, in a moment of such exigency. He well knew, indeed, that it is by no means a necessary result, that the conduct of a large body of men will be regulated by the personal opinions of each. The shades of thought and character in different men are so infinite, that, when united, as in multitudes, they produce combinations which defy previous calculation; and besides that fact, there is something in the very change of position, from an isolated station to a place in a large body, which alters the feelings of the persons themselves. Some, singly bold, are timid in a multitude; and some, cowardly as individuals, become even rash when supported by numbers.

Albert Maurice trusted to himself, however, to give the impress of his own mind to all the proceedings of the great burghers, and through them to rule the people also: but he well knew that the task before him would be to restrain rather than to excite; for seldom, very seldom, has a country, justly or unjustly, risen against the power that previously ruled it, without going infinitely farther than those who stirred it up originally designed.*

* The only exception that I know, is to be found in the last French Revolution.

As soon as he perceived that all whom he had called were present, the young citizen at once determined to address them, before any one else could interpose to give a wrong direction to their efforts. "Men of Ghent," he said, "may I crave your patience for a moment? Certain news has just been received by our friend and fellow-citizen here present,"—and he pointed to the druggist,—"that in this last and fatal battle, wherein he staked his country's welfare and shed his people's blood in an unjust quarrel, Charles Duke of Burgundy has paid the forfeit of his obstinacy and ambition with his life. Now, men of Ghent, who is there amongst us that does not feel that our rights have been infringed, our privileges usurped, and our liberties trampled on, by him, who has gone to give an account of all the wrongs he has so boldly committed? We all know it, and we all feel it; and there is not an artisan, however humble, in all Ghent—nay, in all Flanders—that is not preparing to take arms to vindicate the freedom of our native land. That freedom, citizens, we may look upon as secure; for never yet did a whole nation join heart and hand in asserting its liberty, but it gained its object against all opposition. But, oh! my friends, let us beware—let us be cautious—let us be wise—let us be just—let us be merciful. Those who would guide a stirred-up people through a successful insurrection, must be calm as well as bold, and moderate as well as zealous. The wild horses of popular excitement must be governed with a firm and a clear eye, and strong rein, or they will pass far beyond the golden goal of liberty, and rush into bloodshed, anarchy, and licence. We take upon ourselves a great and an awful responsibility; and every drop of unnecessary blood that is shed in this great effort, will cry loudly to Heaven for vengeance on the head of the rash men who caused or suffered it to flow. The sway of all that vast and wealthy land which lately rested in the hand of Charles, called the Bold, has now descended to a young and gentle lady, who, if her counsellors be good——"

"We will give her good counsellors!" cried some one beside him; but Albert Maurice proceeded—"Who, if her counsellors be good, will, at our petition, not only restore to us our rights and privileges, but will afford us some security that they shall never be infringed again. But let us do nothing harshly. Let us proceed mildly and legally, though firmly; and first petition, as good and faithful subjects, for the redress of our wrongs, before

we proceed to obtain it by our own right hands. Such moderation, my friends, will gain us the love and support of all good men—will prevent neighbouring princes from interfering while we obtain our liberty—and will at once serve best our cause, and satisfy the conscience of the most scrupulous."

"Methinks, Master Albert Maurice, you have already begun pretty boldly," said one of the more moderate of the citizens: "I hear that the gates and walls of the city have already been forcibly taken from the duke's guard, and the soldiers have been disarmed."

"That, sir, was done," replied Albert Maurice, "solely for our own security; and had it not been done, our meeting now, or our petitions hereafter, unsupported by any power of our own, would have been utterly fruitless.—It was done to prevent the princess from being carried away from us before our liberties were secure; it was done to prevent the introduction of large forces into this town, before we were prepared to bid them defiance; and, in doing it, we only asserted and resumed the immemorial right of the citizens of Ghent to guard their own walls and gates,—a right which had been long unjustly usurped."

"It was wisely done! it was nobly done!" cried a number of voices, in the midst of which Ganay the druggist stepped forward, and said,—"Friends, and fellow-citizens! all here present are bearers of high offices in the several trades, and members of the great commune of Ghent; but we are meeting without form or order. Let us resolve ourselves into a council, as a temporary government of the city; and as president thereof I here propose him whose able conduct, whose patriotic zeal, and whose prompt activity, has already conducted us, thus far, with triumphant success."

A murmur of applause followed, which soon rose into a loud and unanimous assent to the proposal. Nor did Albert Maurice affect to decline an office which he had previously determined to assume. His thanks he expressed with manly eloquence, and assured his fellow-citizens, with the convincing voice of true feeling, that the liberty and prosperity of his native land should ever be the dearest wish of his heart, and the principal object of his endeavours.

As soon as this subject was discussed, an old man, one of the fathers of the city, rose up, and addressed the new president. With a slight touch of the monitory garrulity of old age—at

least, most of those who heard him thought it such,—he offered a word or two of caution to the young man who had taken upon him so bold and high a part. "He would not," he said, "urge him to be more moderate in his views, for he seemed to feel the necessity of moderation already; but he would warn him, in the course that was before him,—a course, the turns and circumstances of which, none could yet tell,—to beware of his own heart—to guard against ambition, or revenge, or love: for he was young and ardent; and that spirit must be either very cold or very strong, which could resist the influence of some mighty passion, when under the excitement of great events."

Though Albert Maurice listened with attention, and felt, more deeply than he suffered to appear, the justice of the good man's speech, yet there were others who showed some degree of impatience, and evidently thought it out of season. The old burgher perceived this feeling, and, breaking off quickly, went on with the more immediate matter before them. "It is evident, Master Albert Maurice," he said, "that you have thought over all these events long and deeply before this night; and, indeed, who is there amongst us who has not so thought? What, then, is the result of your consideration? What is the first step that you advise us to take?"

"This," replied Albert Maurice,—"to meet to-morrow early, at the town-house, and there to prepare a petition, at once condoling with the princess on the events which have placed the government in her hands, and beseeching her to listen to the voice of her own heart, and spontaneously to restore, to the good towns of Flanders, those rights and privileges of which her father deprived them. Especially, let us entreat her, in the first instance, to do away with that false and illegal body of men, which, under her father's jurisdiction, and by his appointment, administered in this city—not justice—but the arbitrary will of the prince; and to give us back our true and legitimate magistrates, chosen by ourselves, from amongst ourselves, to dispense our own laws to us and to our children."

While the full mellow voice of the young citizen touched thus pointedly upon those subjects in regard to which the feelings and passions of the druggist Ganay were so highly excited, the eye of the unhappy father flashed like a living fire, and a small bright red spot gathered in the centre of his sallow cheek, while his lip quivered as if he could scarcely restrain the passion from

bursting forth. The moment that Albert Maurice had done speaking, he started up from his seat, and exclaimed in a quick, sharp, discordant voice, which trembled with the very effort that he made to banish from its tones anything like personal rancour, —"I second the proposal. Are we all agreed?"

"We are," echoed the conclave.

"Now I," continued Ganay, "must offer my proposal, too. Listen to me, men of Ghent. Our rights are our own—inherent —unchangeable—which the voice of no despot can wring from us—which his power may hold in abeyance, but which it can never destroy—which, when even suspended, still exist in full force, and render everything that is done in opposition to them unjust, illegal, criminal: I therefore call upon you solemnly to arraign and to condemn those men, who, chosen from ourselves by the late despot, Charles, became the instruments of his tyranny against their own countrymen. The twenty-six men, falsely calling themselves magistrates of Ghent,—appointed, not by the people of Ghent, according to ancient law and usage, but by the Duke of Burgundy, contrary to all our inclinations and consent,—have, for nearly ten years, presumed to rule and judge, and doom to punishment, and shed blood, within the walls of this city; for which, as traitors, oppressors, and murderers, unjustified in their proceedings by any law or right, I claim their death, as the just punishment for their crimes, and a due warning unto others in the time to come."

As he spoke, his whole frame trembled with the angry passion that was burning at his heart. His words flowed rapidly and clear; and his face, with the bright dark eyes, flashing from beneath his heavy-knitted brow, offered the very picture of eloquent revenge. A murmur of doubtful import spread through his auditory,—some carried away by his passionate oratory—some unwilling to begin their course with such a sweeping act of severity. Albert Maurice himself,—sympathizing deeply with the feelings of the childless father, yet resolved, upon every principle of reason and right, to oppose a proposition which, he well knew, proceeded rather from the spirit of revenge than a sense of justice,—paused between his contending feelings; when, to the surprise of all, good Martin Fruse raised up his portly person, and, with one of those bursts of generous indignation, which sometimes rendered him almost eloquent, opposed himself strongly to the course suggested by his friend the druggist.

"No, no!" he exclaimed; "no, no! that will never do. Good God! my fellow-citizens, shall it be hereafter said that the people of Ghent rose up powerfully in defence of their own liberties, and made their first act the slaughter of six-and-twenty defenceless men, who had been acting under the belief that they were justified by the law? If any one was to blame, it was the Duke Charles, not they; and good sooth, I doubt, that, at the worst, you could prove they did not legally hold their posts; for, by my faith! we all consented that the duke should appoint them, when we thought he was going to hang us all. A cheap bargain we thought it then, when he was at our gates with ten thousand men. But even were it not so, and had we not consented, should we be the first to make widows and orphans in our own city? Should we shed more Flemish blood, when so much has already flowed to no purpose? Should we punish men for actions in which they believed there was no offence? Fie! fie! Take from them their offices; reprove them for having so far betrayed their country, as to accept the post they held from one who had no right to give it; and let them go back to their dwellings to mourn over their fall. What say you, my fair nephew? do I judge aright?"

"Most wisely, sir, as far as my poor judgment goes," replied Albert Maurice. "None would show more rigorous justice towards men who, perhaps, have been somewhat severe in the discharge of their office, than I would, but that it is clear that the citizens of Ghent formally consented to their nomination by the duke, and, therefore, that during his life, they were acting at least under legal authority."

"But not after his death!" cried Ganay. "Charles Duke of Burgundy died on the fifth day of this month; and three days after his death my child was butchered by men whose only title to authority had ceased. The cry of blood must and shall be heard; and if it be not——"

Whatever the druggist added, was muttered in so low a tone, that no one distinguished its import. Albert Maurice, however, saw the necessity of conciliating him, well knowing the influence he possessed over the minds of many whose support was absolutely requisite to success in their undertaking. He now also began to experience how difficult is the task of binding into one mass a large body of men, without any power over them, but that which is afforded by the evanescent bubble,

popularity. Revenge, ambition, avarice, vanity, pride, and every other passion common to the sons of man, he knew must ever be fertile sources of disunion in assemblies where, as in that over which he presided, each one feels that his individual adhesion is of too great consequence to the schemes of the rest, for anything to be refused him, however unreasonable his request. But he had yet to learn that the enchanter's wand, that stilled the very angry seas themselves, would wave in vain over the unbridled passions of mankind.

"Master Ganay,"—replied the young citizen, seeing the impression which had been made upon a great part of the burghers by the certain fact that the druggist's son had been condemned and executed after the duke's death,—"the case you mention is one totally distinct from any of the rest, and must be considered and judged of apart. Doubt not you shall have full justice done you; and the day after to-morrow we will assemble in our public hall, and solemnly debate on what course we must pursue in that respect. In the meanwhile, let us not embarrass our present consultations with any point on which there may be a difference of opinion;—morning will soon be here. Our proceedings, then, are thus far determined:—first, to petition the princess for restoration of our rights: if she grant them, well; but if by evil counsellors she be persuaded to refuse, then to assert them with our blood and with our fortunes, till the last man amongst us perish! Am I right?—Well, then," proceeded Albert Maurice, as a ready assent followed his words, and many of the assembly rose to depart, "to-morrow, by eight in the morning, let us meet in the town-hall; and, in the meantime, friends and fellow-counsellors of the good city of Ghent, have I not your authority to provide for the guarding and safety of the town?"

"You have! you have!" was the general reply; "and now good night."

One by one the counsellors of the town of Ghent departed from the apartment of the young citizen. But Ganay, the druggist, lingered behind the rest. The conversation between him and Albert Maurice was brief and rapid, but stern and to the point.

"Albert Maurice," said the druggist, "are we still one in purpose?"

"If you so will," replied the young burgher; "but beware that you bring nothing to divide our councils."

"Nay, rather, you beware that you stand not between the sword of justice and its victim," rejoined the other; "for, as I live, if you do, my love for you will become something bitterer than hate; and more than your ruin—the ruin of your cause, shall follow."

The eye of the young citizen flashed fiercely, as he was thus dared in the first hour of power. "Mark me!" he said, grasping the arm of his companion, and bending his majestic head over him, while he fixed his full stern glance upon the sallow face of the other—"mark me! It is time that our mutual determination should be spoken: yours has already found voice—now hearken to mine. For the service you may do to the cause that I hold dear, I will give a certain way to your revenge.—You see I understand you.—But if you take one step beyond that, and show me that you would rule our efforts for your purposes, I will crush you or die. Man, you have met with your master! and, though you may have caused the misery of lordly houses, the star of my destiny is above your scope!"

As Albert Maurice spoke, the cheek of the druggist turned even paler than before; and he answered, in a subdued voice,—"Ha! indeed! We do, then, know more of each other than I thought.—But this is all vain," he added, after a momentary pause; "if you know so much, you know, too, that I love you. But, Albert Maurice, I must—I will have my revenge."

"You shall have justice," replied the young citizen, "and I will not oppose you; though I think reason, and humanity, and a right construction of the law, should save the unhappy men at whom you aim. The day after to-morrow, however, plead your own cause before the council in the town-hall. I will be absent; and if they judge for you, I will not interpose by word or deed."

The druggist paused, and thought for a moment. "Be it so," he said, at length. "They must condemn them: and now for you, Albert Maurice. Mark *me!* There are two paths open before you. The one, which you seem choosing for yourself, leads to a long struggle between the people and the throne, which, after nicely balancing rights, and weighing tenderly the thousand grains of dust that constitute all questions of government and policy, shall end in nothing for the state, and your own death and ruin. The other, on which I would guide

you, conducts, by a few bold strides, to power, to empire, and to *love!*—You see I know you, too! Choose for yourself, and let your actions speak the result. Farewell! I will be ever by your side, to prompt you to your own advantage, even to the last moment."

Thus speaking, the druggist quitted the apartment, and followed the rest of the citizens; while Albert Maurice remained in the solitude of his own chamber, with his eyes fixed still upon the spot where Ganay had stood.

"To power—to empire—to love!" he repeated, in a low tone. "How dexterously yon man knows to mix the small portion of leaven, calculated to turn and change the whole heart of him to whom he speaks. To power—to empire—and to love!" and the young burgher seated himself slowly, and turned his head towards the shady side of the room, as if the very light of the lamps looked into his heart, and disturbed the intense thoughts that were working in the dark chamber of his bosom.

"No!" he cried, at length, clasping his hands together; "No! no! no! My country, thou shalt be my first object! and if, in serving thee, without one effort for myself, aught of good befall me personally, I will receive it, only as a reward for working thy freedom; but never shall the thought of my individual wishes mingle with my aspirations for the benefit of my native land.—Fiend! how thou hast tempted me!"

He then gave a moment or two to other ideas connected with his situation at the time; and the first blossom of that full harvest of regrets, which every man, who sows the Cadmean seeds of civil strife, is destined to reap in bitterness of heart, rose up in his bosom, as he thought of the fate of the unhappy men, whom he felt forced to yield to the revenge of Ganay; or to resign every hope of delivering his country. It was the first sacrifice of better feeling he had yet been obliged to make;—but the first is ever the augury of many more. Albert Maurice, indeed, would fain have persuaded himself that it was not a sacrifice. He strove to prove to his own mind that the men deserved their fate. He called up instances of their severity—of their cruelty; and recapitulated to his own heart the specious sophistry of Ganay; asserting that the act they had committed —however just had been their sentence on the druggist's son— was illegal, from the previous death of him from whom alone they derived their power. He reasoned, he argued in vain—his

heart was unsatisfied; when a neighbouring clock, striking the hour of five, made him start from his seat, and gladly take advantage of its warning voice, to cast away thoughts that brought regret, in the busy activity of preparing the city to hold firmly the power it had assumed.

CHAPTER XXI.

We shall pass over the forenoon of the following day rapidly. The news of her father's death reached Mary of Burgundy early in the morning; and though she wept long and bitterly, her grief was now more calm and tranquil, than it had been while uncertainty remained mingled with sorrow. More agitating tidings, however, had reached the Lord of Imbercourt and the Chancellor Hugonet, at a still earlier hour: for, by daybreak, the first rumours of the disarming of the soldiery, and the seizure of the gates and walls of the city by the burgher guard, had been communicated to them; and before they could take any measures in consequence, the painful fact that every post or defence in Ghent was in the hands of the citizens, had been reported from all quarters. Respect for the grief of the Princess caused them to withhold from her, for some hours, the knowledge which they themselves possessed of the state of the city; and it was only when, by means of some other private agents, they received information that the principal burghers of the town had assembled in the town-house, and were voting a petition to the Princess, praying a restitution of all those rights and privileges, of which they had been deprived by Duke Charles, that they found it absolutely necessary to communicate to her, both what had occurred and what was likely to follow.

The news affected Mary of Burgundy less than they had expected; and, indeed, proved only a sufficient stimulus to rouse her from the grief into which she had fallen.

"Fear not, my Lord of Imbercourt," she said, as she saw the apprehension that overshadowed his countenance; "fear not, I will soon find means to quiet and satisfy the good people of Ghent. It was only while the will and ordinances of my father

were opposed to my own inclinations, that I found any difficulty, or entertained any fear, in regard to the tranquillity of the state."

"I hope, madam, and I trust," replied Imbercourt, "that you may find it easy; but a stirred-up population is like one of those ravenous beasts, that seems to acquire a greater appetite by feeding largely. I trust that the Lords of Ravestein and Cleves, with others to whom I have despatched messengers, may soon arrive, and in sufficient force to overawe these insolent burghers; so that you may be obliged to grant nothing but that which is just and right, and be able to check concession at the proper point.—Hark, lady!" he added, as a distant shout burst upon his ear, "the unmanly brutes allow you not one day for sorrow: they are coming even now."

Mary's cheek turned a little pale; but she showed no other sign of apprehension; and merely replied—"Let them come, my lord! They shall find it difficult to conquer the love of Mary of Burgundy; for love is the only arms that I shall oppose to my subjects. Alas! that they should ever be mine! I beseech you, my good lords, to have the hall of audience fittingly prepared to receive the people, who seem approaching fast. Have such guards and attendants drawn up as may give us some show of state. Alice, my sweet friend, seek out the noble duchess, and pray her to cast by her grief for a moment; for much do I need her presence and support, in what is about to occur."

The orders of the Princess were promptly obeyed. Margaret of York joined her in a few minutes. The hall of audience was prepared as speedily as possible; and everything was ready for the reception of the burghers before they reached the gates of the palace. The deputation, consisting of about twenty persons, dressed in their municipal robes, proceeded from the town-house on foot, followed and surrounded by an immense multitude of the lower orders, shouting loudly—"Ghent and liberty! Ghent and liberty! Long live the noble Syndics!" They soon arrived at the building called the *Cours du Prince;* and some surprise, perhaps, was felt by the citizens, on finding themselves at once admitted to the palace, without any question, and ushered, through a line of armed guards, to the great hall of audience. The general impression among them was, that the counsellors of the Princess, possessing a greater armed force than the towns-

men had been aware of, were determined to bring the matter to an immediate decision; and, perhaps, even to arrest them in the palace, for the events of the night before. This supposition was rather increased by the appearance of the hall of audience, which was also lined with armed attendants; and by the demeanour of Imbercourt, Hugonet, and other counsellors, who stood with somewhat severe and frowning countenances on each side of the chair of state, which now remained vacant, under the rich crimson canopy that had so often overhung the stern, determined features of Charles the Bold.

As soon as they had entered the chamber, the deputation paused, uncertain to whom to address themselves. The counsellors neither spoke nor changed their position; and, for a few moments, there was a dead, unpleasant silence, which no one chose to break. At that instant, however, when the dumb confronting of the court and the citizens was becoming even painful to both, the door by the side of the throne was thrown open by one of the huissiers or door-keepers, and Mary of Burgundy, leaning on the arm of Margaret of York, preceded by some of the officers of the palace, and followed by two or three female attendants, entered the apartment, and advanced towards the chair.

She ascended the steps on which it was raised, but did not sit down; and, turning towards the deputation of the burghers, she bowed her head with a gentle inclination, while the novelty of her situation, the feeling that she was taking possession of her dead father's throne, and the difficulty of her circumstances, overcame her firmness for an instant, and she burst into tears.

Wiping the drops rapidly from her eyes, she made a sign to the Chancellor Hugonet, who immediately took a step forward, and said—addressing the deputation of citizens, who still stood at the further end of the room,—"The high and mighty Princess, Mary, Duchess of Burgundy, Countess of Flanders and Hainault, is ready to receive any persons on behalf of her good town of Ghent."

There was a slight pause; and then Albert Maurice, as president of the provisional council, advanced towards the throne, and knelt on one knee upon the first step. Mary extended her fair hand to him, as he knelt, and with a flushed cheek and quivering lip, the young burgher bent his head over it, while something very like a tear glittered in his eye, too. In his left hand he held a

roll of parchment; and, before he rose, he said—"Madam, I come to lay at your feet a humble address of condolence, and petition, from your good and faithful subjects, the citizens of Ghent. Is it your good pleasure that I read it?"

Mary bowed her head; and Albert Maurice, rising from his knee, unrolled the parchment which he held, and read, in gentle and respectful tones, the address which had that morning been agreed to in the town-hall. The terms in which it was couched were as mild and moderate as the young burgher, by his utmost eloquence, had been able to procure. The citizens, in the language of grief and respect, spoke of the high qualities of the late Duke of Burgundy; and touched, as lightly as possible, upon those acts of arbitrary power and barbarous harshness, which had deprived him of that love, which the more noble and generous parts of his character might have obtained from his subjects. They continued, however, to notice his attacks upon the liberties of the good towns of Flanders, in terms both severe and firm; and they petitioned the Princess immediately to take into consideration the consequences which such aggressions had produced, and to remedy the wrong that had been done by her father.

While Albert Maurice read the petition, the deputation had gradually advanced, and formed a little semicircle at a few yards' distance from the throne; and when the young citizen had concluded, the Princess immediately replied, addressing herself to all:—

"I did think, my good friends," she said, in a tone rather sad than reproachful, "that the day on which I first heard the sad news of my poor father's death, might have been passed in privacy, sanctified to mourning and to sorrow. I know, however, that communities are little capable of feeling for the griefs and affections of individuals, especially when those individuals are their princes; and, therefore, laying by my sorrow, I come willingly to hear your wants and wishes, and to assure you all, of my firm resolve to do everything I can, to satisfy and to make you happy. In regard to the rights and privileges of the city of Ghent, far be it from me, now or ever, to inquire why they were restrained or abridged by your late sovereign lord, my father; or to renew old griefs and dissensions, by investigating who was right or wrong in the times past. Me, men of Ghent, you have never yet offended: you are my fellow-countrymen, therefore I

feel for you; you are my subjects, therefore I love you. At once, then, whether as a boon, or as a right—whether as your own due, or as a testimony of the affection of Mary of Burgundy—take, hold, and use wisely, all those privileges and immunities whatever, which you can prove that you have possessed at any time within fifty years of the present day. Farther back let us not inquire, for it would lead us to times when Ghent and Flanders, under the usurped domination of a man who was raised from the dregs of the people, by the people's discontent, endured a grosser and more bloody tyranny than ever they suffered from the most savage and cruel of their native princes."

"We thankfully accept your Grace's bounty," replied Albert Maurice; "and without derogating from our own inherent rights, we willingly receive your free and generous confirmation of them, as a grace and benefit conferred; and so humbly take our leave."

"You will confer, my friends," said Mary, "with my chancellor here present, in regard to all the particulars which you may claim, and will have them clearly established and defined, to the full extent of the words that I have used."

The deputation were then permitted to kiss the hand of the Princess, and withdrew; and Mary, after giving one hasty glance round the hall of audience, retired, once more to indulge her grief in her own apartments.

With her, and with the Duchess of York, the hours passed in lonely mourning, only interrupted from time to time by an occasional call to transact some of the necessary business of the state; or by the tidings of some event which it was thought indispensable to communicate. In the streets and lanes of the city, however, the day went by with all those signs which show an anxious and excited population. Continual crowds collected in various parts of the town; now conversing among themselves, now listening to some popular declaimer. The busy and important were seen hurrying to and fro in every direction. The song, the fiddle, or the *cornemuse*, were exchanged for pitiable verses on the pitiable battle of Nancy; and while one part of the city was overflowing with people, and rang with the sound of many tongues, another showed streets totally deserted, the abode of silence and solitude.

At length, towards evening, a strong disposition to riot and tumult displayed itself. Whispers and rumours, originating no

one knew where, were spread rapidly amongst the crowd, tending strongly to excite them to outrage. Some said that the council were bringing in large bodies of soldiers; some that the nobles were arming their attendants, and intended to repossess themselves of the gates. But the strongest and most generally credited reports were directed against the eschevins, or police magistrates of the city, whose very duties of investigation and punishment rendered them at all times obnoxious to the lower classes, but who were now hated in a tenfold degree, from the abrogation of the popular form of election in their last appointment. In several districts petty tumults actually took place: whoever bore the appearance of either a noble or a lawyer was insulted as soon as he appeared; and the burgher guard, which was more than once called out, with a very natural leaning to the people from which it was selected, took merely such means of repression as dispersed the crowds in one spot, only to collect in larger numbers in another.

In the meanwhile, Maillotin du Bac, as prévôt, and the druggist Ganay, as one of the notables of the town, mingled with the crowds, and harangued them with the apparent purpose of persuading them to return peaceably to their houses. The first, indeed, was anything but popular in the city; and some supposed that he was exposing himself to outrage by the active part he took; but it was wonderful to see how readily he assumed the tone and deportment necessary to captivate the people, and how speedily the multitude forgot his former conduct. It is true that neither he nor Ganay in their speeches said one word to appease the current of popular indignation, or to divert it from the point to which it was tending. They used every sort of common-place argument to induce the people to return to their own dwellings. They told them that it would be much better, much safer, much more prudent, to disperse, and to let things take their course; though they acknowledged, at the same time, that the eschevins, in the discharge of their illegal office, had acted cruelly and basely. Nevertheless, they said, that those instruments of tyranny would doubtless be brought to justice, if they were not by any means smuggled out of the city. In short, they did what may always be done, excited the people in a far greater degree, while they affected to tranquillize them; and pointed their fury to the very object from which they pretended to turn it.

The troops which remained in the town, though totally insufficient to overawe the citizens, or to repossess themselves of the walls and gates, were numerous enough to hold out, for any length of time, the palace or Cours du Prince, as it was called, which, according to the custom of the day, was strongly fortified; and which was, luckily, fully provisioned. The attention, therefore, of the ministers of the orphan princess was solely directed to adding temporary defences to her dwelling, and to repairing any slight defect which time or oversight had produced, without attempting the vain task of putting down the turbulent spirit which was manifesting itself in the city. No hostility, indeed, was evinced by the populace towards the princess or her attendants; and servants were suffered to go to and from the palace without the slightest molestation. But still the tidings of tumultuous movements, in various parts of the town, poured in through the evening; and, as Mary sat in a high chamber of a tall tower, long since pulled down, but which then rose above most of the buildings round, the distant shouts and cries caught her ear, and more than once made her inquire the cause. Towards nightfall, Imbercourt was summoned to her presence; and she asked eagerly if there were no means of pacifying the people.

"None, madam," replied the minister; "without, indeed, you could bribe some of their demagogues; and that would, of course, be merely hiring them to create tumults hereafter, whenever they wanted a fresh supply. I am afraid they must be suffered to have their way for a time. In the end, the populace will see their own folly, and the base selfishness of those that mislead them, and will return to quiet and tranquillity of their own accord. In the meanwhile, thank God, the palace is secure; so be under no apprehensions, madam, for we could hold it out for six months, against any force they can bring."

"Oh, I fear not for myself, my lord," replied Mary; "I fear for my subjects and my friends. I beseech you, my lord, leave not the palace to-night: they might murder you in your way to your own hotel."

"I do not believe, madam, that they have any ill-will towards me," replied Imbercourt: "I have never done them wrong, and have often stood between them and the anger of their prince. But my duty commands me to remain here, at least till the town is somewhat more calm; and I certainly will not quit the palace this night."

So saying, he withdrew; and Mary approached the lattice of the room in which she had been sitting, and which commanded a somewhat extensive view over the city; though the objects that were visible were rather the roofs of buildings and the spires of churches, than the busy multitudes which she would fain have watched, herself unseen. Every now and then, however, a glance was to be caught of some of the manifold canals and squares of Ghent; and Mary threw open the window, in order, ere the light faded away entirely, to gain a view of any of the crowds whose shouts she heard. But the effort was vain; and turning away from the chilling blast of the January wind, she closed the window, and was returning to her seat, when she found that Alice of Imbercourt had followed her to the deep arch in which the casement was situated.

"I wish, dearest lady," said her fair follower, "that you would take the counsel of a simple girl, which, I have a fond belief, would be better than that of all these grave signiors."

"Well, my Alice," replied the Princess, with a faint smile, "what would you have me do?"

"May I speak boldly, lady?" demanded Alice.

"Ay, indeed, as boldly as you will," answered Mary, whose heart wanted some bosom into which to pour its anxieties and sorrows.—"But first, dear friend, send away those two girls, who sit moping by the fire, sharing my distress, without feeling my grief. Bid the page go light the lamps in the lower chamber, and tell them to take thither their embroidery frames, and work diligently, while we two stay here in the grey twilight, as dim and melancholy as my thoughts."

Her commands were speedily obeyed. "And now, Alice," she said, as the other returned, "what would you have me do?"

"I would have you despatch a messenger this very night," replied the young lady, boldly, "to the only person on whose arm and to whose heart you can rely to defend and guard you in the present strait—I mean to the Arch——"

"Hush, hush!—Not for a universe!" cried Mary. "Good Heaven! what would he deem me?—No, Alice, no! you would surely never advise me to such a step. Fie! fie! mention it not!"

"I knew that you would start away, my dearest mistress," replied her fair counsellor; "but you must hear me still. What can you do better? What can you do so well? The circum-

stances in which you are placed—the difficulties which surround you—do they not justify such an act? do they not render it wise and right, instead of indelicate and bold? The Archduke Maximilian was once plighted to you by your own father; and if ever two people loved each other——"

"Hush, hush! Alice, I entreat, I command," interrupted the Princess. "It must not, it cannot be.—If such be all your advice, speak no more: what I wanted was counsel, how to tranquillize these unquiet people of Ghent."

"I had something to say on that score, too," replied Alice of Imbercourt; "but perchance, my advice will not be more palatable to you, in regard to that matter, than in regard to the other."

"Nay, nay; be not offended, Alice," answered Mary; "none can judge of that on which you were speaking, but myself; but, of this business of Ghent, perhaps any one can judge better."

"Well, then, madam, I will say my say," replied Alice; "and you can follow my counsel or not, as you think best. You marked the young burgher, with the furred robe and the gold chain, who read you the address this morning?—You must remember him—as handsome a youth as ever lady's eye rested on."

"I scarcely saw him," said the Princess; "nor should have noticed him at all, but that I think it was the same who, some three or four months since, was accused before the council of high treason, and acquitted himself most nobly."

"The same, exactly the same," replied Alice: "his name is Albert Maurice, as I hear; and he bears the noblest reputation of any young citizen of them all. I have heard even my own father declare, that yon young man has too high a mind, and too noble a spirit, for his class and station."

"Well, what of him?" demanded the Princess; "I fear me that his noble spirit will work us little good; for, from all I saw to-day, he seems to lead the disaffected of the city."

"You marked him not as I did, madam," answered Alice: "never mind what I saw, or what I fancied that I saw. He does lead all parties in the city, I hear; and I am fain to think, that had it not been for him, that petition and address, as they call it, would have had a ruder tone.—Lady, that young man is well disposed towards you and yours; and I believe that he might be easily worked upon to use his great influence to cure the present madness of the people."

"Indeed, I believe he is well disposed," said Mary; "for, I remember, by your father's counsel, I had him called back after the trial, and besought him, in private, to do his best to maintain peace and order in the city."

"My father's counsel was wise, madam," replied Alice, with a quiet smile; "and his daughter's is just of the same piece. What I would have you do now is what my father led you to do then. Send for this Albert Maurice, and beseech him, fairly and gently, to do his best to quiet the populace, and to restore tranquillity. Appeal to his generosity—to his gratitude;—show him how frankly you granted the petition of the citizens this morning; and, take my word, you will make a convert and a powerful friend."

"With all my heart," exclaimed Mary, at once; "but there is no time to be lost: hie thee down to thy father, dear Alice; tell him what I have resolved to do, and bid him send a messenger for the young citizen directly."

"Nay, nay, dear lady," answered Alice, smiling again, "that way will never do. In the first place, I hear my father is not, just now, the best beloved in the city, for suffering a young man to be executed who had committed murder, and was condemned by the eschevins; and, besides that, I learned from one of my women but now, that he had sent, in his own name, to this Albert Maurice and another of the citizens, named Ganay, and that they refused to come."

"Then, most probably, they would refuse me, too," replied the Princess; "and though Mary of Burgundy will do all that she can to make her people happy, she must not stoop to beg their presence, and be refused."

"No fear, no fear, madam," said Alice of Imbercourt; "but leave the matter to me, and I will answer for it, that, ere half an hour be over, the young citizen shall be standing here before you."

"What do you propose to do, then," demanded the Princess.

"Merely to write a billet, desiring Master Albert Maurice, in the name of Mary, Duchess of Burgundy, to render himself to the palace, with all speed, in order to speak with his sovereign," was her fair attendant's answer.

"Nay, but it may seem strange," said the Princess; "I hardly dare to do so without speaking with your father."

"If you make it a matter for counsellors, lady," replied Alice,

"all our scheme fails, or worse may come of it than you suspect. I have already heard the constable of the reiters and one of your Grace's council regretting that they did not seize upon the deputation this morning, as a pledge for the submission of the people. No, no; he must come in disguise, and must go in disguise. I will send the page with the billet; he is shrewd and active, and shall bring him in by the postern, on the canal. Nay, nay, lady," she added, seeing Mary about to make some farther opposition, "I will take it all upon myself. I will write the note, and send the page, and bid the sentry give him admission on his return: and if ought is heard of it, it will but pass for the trick of a mad-headed girl;—and I have more to lose than you, too, my princess," she continued, laughing; "for I have a lover who could be as jealous as a spaniel dog, if I chose to let him."

Mary still hesitated, and probably might have refused her consent; but some nearer and louder shouts met her ear, giving evidence that the crowds were increasing as the night came on, and determined her to accede. Alice's proposal was agreed to accordingly; and, as every moment was apparently adding to the tumult in the city, she proceeded to put the scheme in execution immediately.

CHAPTER XXII.

The torrent of business in which Albert Maurice found himself involved, had occupied his time in such a manner as hardly to permit of his giving much attention to the tumultuous assemblages which took place, during the day, in various parts of the city. Popular leaders, indeed, are apt to attach too little importance to those commotions which, being frequently raised by themselves with ease and rapidity, they fancy they can allay with the same facility and power; but a time comes when they are to be undeceived, and it was approaching with Albert Maurice. Towards two o'clock the young citizen had addressed the people in the market-place, and had easily induced them to disperse, by informing them that the princess had most generously granted them, of her own accord, all that they could desire. He had

then—in the belief that all the other crowds would melt away, in the same manner, before night—retired to his own dwelling; and, in the most remote and noiseless apartment which it contained, had proceeded to make, with rapidity and decision, all those arrangements on which depended the defence of the city against external enemies, and the predominance of the popular party within its walls. He wrote at length to all the municipal councils of the various towns in Flanders; he took measures for organizing a considerable national force; he sent express orders to the guard at all the gates, to refuse admission to any party of armed men; and he issued orders for the fabrication of arms as speedily as possible, in order that the citizens might be found in a state of preparation, if the privileges and liberty they had regained should be menaced from without.

Thus passed the three hours of light that remained after his return home; and busy hours they were. At length feeling himself, notwithstanding his great corporeal powers, somewhat wearied with the immense exertions which he had made, he proceeded into the garden attached to his dwelling, which formed little terrace on the banks of the Lys. As he stood there, turning his aching brow to the cool wind, the full roar of the tumult in the city burst upon his ear, like the distant sound of a stormy sea; and, after listening for a few moments to the combination of discordant noises, which rose up from the many streets and squares, he felt at once that some great change had taken place in the popular mind since he had left the market-place; and, turning quickly back, he prepared to go forth and use all the power he knew that he possessed to restore tranquillity. At his own door, however, he was met by a boy, who instantly pronounced his name, though it was now dark, and demanded to speak with him.

"Who, and what are you, boy?" demanded the young citizen.

"I bear you a billet from a lady," replied the youth; "and you must read it directly."

"A billet from a lady!" cried Albert Maurice, with a sneer, curling his handsome lip, "go, go, my boy, this is no time for idle gallantries. Give me the note, and get thee hence; I will read it to-morrow."

"Nay, but you must read it this moment," the other answered,

without giving him the note: "ay, and that in private, too," he added. "So come, good sir, go back into your house,—and take it with reverence and care, for it deserves no less."

"Thou art bold enough," replied Albert Maurice; but at the same time there was something in the deportment of the boy, so unlike that of the common *Love's messengers* of those days, that he yielded to his desire; and, turning into the house, strode quickly to the chamber in which he had been writing, and in which a light was still burning.

The moment he had entered, the apparel of the page, and a small St. Andrew's cross, embroidered on his left breast, at once showed that he was a servant of the house of Burgundy. Instantly closing the door, Albert Maurice took the note with every sign of reverence and respect, and read it attentively by the light of the lamp. As he did so, however, his cheek flushed, and then turned pale and flushed again, and he demanded eagerly, "Who gave you this note, Sir Page?"

"The Lady Alice of Imbercourt," replied the boy; "and she bade me lead you speedily to the postern on the river."

Albert Maurice paused, and mused; and though no heart that ever beat in a human bosom knew less of fear than his, yet the ordinary calculation of danger which every one makes when engaged in enterprises of importance forced itself upon his notice, and he could not but feel that the step proposed to him was replete with peril. Was it probable, he asked himself, that the princess should send to him at that hour? And was not the dispatch of the note he held in his hand, much more likely to be part of a scheme framed by the prévôt or some of the inferior agents of the government, in order to get the chief leader of the popular party—the president of the provisional council—into their hands, as a tie upon the people?

Yet, as he gazed upon the billet, it was evidently a woman's writing; and as he re-read the contents there was something in it all, which put prudence and caution to flight at once. Was not the very name of Mary of Burgundy enough?—To be requested by her to visit her dwelling in secrecy and disguise!—to see her, to speak with her in private!—to bask in the light of those beautiful eyes!—to hear that soft and thrilling voice!—the very hope was worth all the perils that ever knight or paladin encountered; and his re-perusal of the billet determined him at once to go.

Where to find some speedy means of disguising his person was his next thought; but then, immediately remembering the grey monk's gown in which he had already travelled so far, and which, by some accident, had been left behind by his former guide, he instantly sought it out,—stripped off the furred robe which he had worn through the day,—and buckling on a sword and poniard under the frock, strode on after the page, with that increased feeling of security which we all experience when we know that we have the means about us of selling our lives dearly, happen what will in the course before us.

"Better follow at a short distance behind, good father," said the boy, as they proceeded into the street; "you know your way towards the back of the Cours du Prince. If we go separate we shall the better escape notice, and you will find me on the narrow path beneath the walls."

As he spoke thus, he darted away, and Albert Maurice followed with the hurried step of excitement and expectation. It was now completely dark; and passing onward along the quay of the canals, and through one or two of the many large squares of Ghent, he soon saw enough of popular feeling to make him anxious to resume a garb in which he might take measures for repressing the turbulent spirit that was every moment gaining ground. At the corner of each of the larger streets immense bonfires, blazing and crackling in the chill air, at once lighted, and warmed, and excited the multitudes that assembled round them. But this was not all; wine, and ale too, that genuine Flemish beverage, were circulating rapidly amongst the crowds of men and women, whose class and appearance did not at all warrant the supposition that their own means could procure, even on an extraordinary occasion, such copious supplies of dear and intoxicating liquors. All this excited a suspicion in the mind of Albert Maurice, that some unseen agency was at work, to rouse the people to a far higher pitch than he wished or had expected; and at the same time, he felt that such scenes of tumultuous rejoicing on the news of the loss of a great battle, and the death of their bold and chivalrous sovereign, was indecent in itself, and must be bitter indeed to the child of the dead prince. Such sights, of course, increased his speed; and hastening on as fast as possible, he soon found himself upon the narrow ledge of land between the fortified wall of the palace and the river. But he was alone—the page was

nowhere to be seen; and Albert Maurice began to suspect he had been deceived; but, a moment after, the appearance of the boy, hurrying up as fast as his less powerful limbs permitted, soon showed him that his own anxious haste had outstripped even the page's youthful activity.

Although a sentry paraded the wall above, with his slow match lighted, no challenge was given; and three sharp taps upon the postern door soon caused it to fly open, and admit them within the walls of the building. An inferior officer of the guard stood by, and held a lantern to the face of the page as he entered. The boy endured his scrutiny quietly; but, to the surprise of the young citizen, he found that the appearance of the page was received as a passport for himself. The officer withdrew the lantern without farther comment, as soon as he had satisfied himself in regard to the boy's person, and suffered Albert Maurice and his conductor to enter the palace.

Up long and manifold staircases, through innumerable doors and interminable passages, the page led the leader of the Gandois, and only stopped at length, when both were out of breath, at a small, deep doorway, where he knocked before he entered, making a sign to Albert Maurice to pause. The boy was then told to come in, and remained within for some minutes, while the young burgher continued in the dark passage—his heart beating, as he thought of his near meeting with Mary of Burgundy, with that thrill of expectation which would seem to partake of the nature of fear, were it not almost always mingled in some way with feelings not only of hope, but of joy.

After a time the boy returned; and, leading the young burgher to another door, he threw it open, and admitted him into an apartment fitted up with all the ostentatious splendour for which Charles of Burgundy had been famous in the decoration of his palaces. It seemed to have been a room peculiarly allotted to that prince's leisure moments; for all around hung various implements of sylvan sport, each ornamented in some way with the arms of Burgundy, and piled up against the walls in the manner of trophies.

There is something strangely solemn in entering the chamber of one lately dead. It seems more empty—more vacant and cold, than when its master, though absent, is living. It appeals to our own feelings and connects itself—by the thin gossamer threads of selfishness which the human heart draws between our

own fate and every external event that befalls our fellow-men—with an after-period, when our chamber shall be left thus cold and lonely, and our place be no longer found amongst the living.

All spoke of the last Duke Charles, and of the bold rude sports of which he had been fond. Even the sconce that held a few lighted tapers was fashioned in the shape of a boar's head; and as the young citizen entered the chamber, he felt that feeling of pity for, and sympathy with, the deceased prince which nothing could have inspired but his death—that common fate which breaks down all that holds man from man, and first makes us feel our near kindred to each other.

There was no one in the chamber; and the page, after telling Albert Maurice that the lady would be with him in a moment, retired and left him to think both of the living and the dead. His thoughts of the latter, however, soon ceased; for in this active life the solemn impressions are naturally the most transitory; and the expectation of meeting Mary of Burgundy soon absorbed the whole. He had no time to analyse his feelings, or to examine with microscopic accuracy the workings of his own heart. Since the day when he had first seen her in the market-place her image had become connected with almost every thought that had passed through his mind. The name of the princess, and her conduct in all the events of the day, of course formed a constant part in the conversation of the people; and whenever she was mentioned, the fair form and the mild liquid eyes rose to the sight of the young burgher; and the sweet melodious tones of her voice seemed to warble in his ear. He had refused to let his own mind inquire what was going on in his bosom; but the words of Ganay had, perhaps, in some degree, opened his eyes to his feelings; and the sensations which he experienced while waiting her coming in that chamber tended still more to undeceive him.

"What, what was he doing?" he asked himself: "encouraging a passion for an object beyond his reach." But even while he so thought, a thousand wild and whirling images rushed across his brain—of triumph, and success, and love. But how was it all to be obtained?—By overthrowing her power to raise himself into her rank,—by overturning the institutions of his country,—by risking the effusion of oceans of blood, and by inducing months of anarchy?—Still these were the only means by which he could ever hope to win the hand of Mary of Burgundy; and he

asked himself, would such means win her love?—Even were he to give way to the towering ambition, which was the only passion that had hitherto struggled with patriotism in his bosom, —the only one which he had feared,—would it obtain the gratification of that love which was now rising up, a stronger passion, still, destined to use the other as its mere slave?

Such feelings as I have said rushed rapidly through his brain, while expectation mingled with the rest, and made his heart beat till it almost caused him to gasp for breath. These sensations were becoming well-nigh intolerable, when the door opened, and Mary of Burgundy, followed a step behind by Alice of Imbercourt, entered the apartment, and the door was closed. The Princess was still pale with grief; but there was a fitful colour came and went in her cheek, that was far lovelier than the most rosy health. Her eyes, too, bore the traces of tears; but their heaviness had something touching in it, which, perhaps, went more directly to the heart than their brighter light.

With a flushed cheek and agitated frame the young burgher advanced a step, and made a profound inclination of the head as the Princess entered, not well knowing whether, when received in so private a manner, to kneel or not. But Mary, after pausing a moment, with a doubtful glance, as her eye fell upon the monk's frock with which he was covered, held out her hand for him to kiss as her subject, a custom then common to almost all ladies of sovereign station; and the young citizen at once bent the knee, and touched that fair hand, with a lip that quivered like that of a frightened child. He then rose, and, stepping back, waited for Mary to express her commands, though his eye from time to time was raised for a single instant to her face, as if he thought to impress those fair features still more deeply on the tablet of his heart.

"I thank you, sir, for coming so speedily," said the Princess; "for, in truth, I have much need of your counsel and assistance."

"I trust, madam, you could not entertain a doubt of my instant obedience to your commands," replied Albert Maurice, finding that she paused.

"The only thing which could have led me to do so," said the Princess, "was your refusal to come at the bidding of my faithful friends, the Lords of Imbercourt and Hugonet."

"There is some great mistake, madam," replied the young citizen, in surprise; "the noblemen, to whom your Grace refers,

have never signified any wish to see me. Had they done so, I should have come at their request, with the same confidence that I have obeyed your commands."

"Alice," cried the Princess, turning to her fair attendant, "my information came from you. I hope it was correct."

"All I can say, fair sir," said Alice of Imbercourt, advancing a step, and applying to the young burgher the term that was generally used in that day, from noble to noble,—"all I can say, fair sir, is, that I heard my father, the Lord of Imbercourt, despatch a messenger this day, at about three of the clock, to entreat Master Albert Maurice and Master Walter Ganay to visit him at the palace immediately; and I heard, scarcely an hour ago, by the report of one of my women, that a direct refusal had been returned."

"Not by me, lady—certainly not by me," replied Albert Maurice. "Since the hour of two, this day, I have been in my own cabinet busily engaged in writing, and know but little of what has passed in the city. But assuredly no messenger has ever reached me to-day from the palace, except the page who brought me the command, which I am here to obey. But you say another name was coupled with mine. Perhaps that person may have returned the uncourteous refusal of which you speak."

"I am very sorry for it, then," answered Mary of Burgundy; "for the matter on which I desired to see you, sir, would be much better transacted with men and statesmen than with a weak woman like myself."

"Your pardon, madam!" exclaimed Albert Maurice. "If what you would say refers to the city of Ghent and its present state, much more may be done by your own commands, expressed personally to myself, than by an oration of the wisest minister that ever yet was born. Statesmen, madam, are often too cold, too prudent, too cautious, to deal with the frank multitude, whose actions are all passion, and whose motives are all impulse. But, oh! madam, there is a natural, generous, gentle feeling about all your demeanour, from your lightest word to your most important deed, which is well calculated to make our hearts serve you, as well as our heads or our hands."

The young burgher spoke with a fervour and an enthusiasm that called the blood up for a moment into Mary's cheek. But as the chivalrous courtesy of the day often prompted expressions of much more romantic admiration, without the slightest further

meaning than mere ordinary civility, Mary of Burgundy saw nothing in the conduct of the young citizen beyond dutiful and loyal affection. The possibility of her having raised a deeper or more tender feeling in the bosom of her subject never once crossed her thoughts. It was to her as a thing impossible; and, though she certainly felt gratified by the fervent tone of loyalty in which Albert Maurice expressed himself, she dreamed not for a moment that that loyalty could ever become a warmer feeling in his breast.

"I trust, sir," she replied, "ever to merit the opinion you have expressed, and to keep the love of my good people of Ghent, as well as that of all my subjects. But, indeed, the conduct that they are now pursuing evinces but small regard either for my feelings or my interest, nor much gratitude for the first willing concession that I have made in their favour. You say, sir, you know little that has passed in the city since an early hour, listen, then to the tidings that have reached me."

Mary then recapitulated all that she had heard concerning the tumults in different parts of the city; and a conversation of considerable length ensued, which,—from all the important and interesting circumstances discussed, from the free and unceremonious communication which it rendered necessary, and from the continual bursts of high and generous sentiments, upon both parts, to which the great events they spoke of gave rise,—brought all the feelings of the young citizen within the circle of the one deep, overpowering passion which had been long growing up in his bosom. If he came there doubting whether he loved Mary of Burgundy, before he left her presence his only doubt was, whether there was anything else on earth worth living for but the love he felt towards her.

Such thoughts had their natural effect both on his appearance and demeanour. He still maintained that tone of deep respect due from a subject to his sovereign; but there was a free grace in all his movements, a brilliant energy in all he said, a spirit of gentle, chivalrous loyalty in all his professions, inspired by the great excitement under which he spoke, that raised the wonder and admiration of Mary herself, though still no one dream of bolder aspirations ever crossed her imagination.

The chamber in which this conference was held was turned towards the river, rather than to the square before the palace; and the shouts which had made themselves loudly audible in the

apartments from which Mary had just come, had hitherto been less distinctly heard where she now stood. But, in a moment after, the multitudes which had assembled in other places seemed directing their course over a bridge, that lay a little higher up the stream; and the sounds came with redoubled force. Shouts, cries, and songs of every kind were borne along with the wind, to the chamber in which the Princess was standing; and, pointing to the casement, she bade the young citizen open it, and hearken to what was passing without.

Albert Maurice did so, and, in listening, his cheek became alternately pale and red; his brow knitted, and his eye flashed; and, turning, to the Princess, he replied, "I know not, madam, what they have done, or what they are about to do, but certainly some sort of insanity seems to have seized upon the people. However, I will this instant go forth, and, as I live, if they have committed the crimes of which I am led to fear they are guilty, from some of the cries I have just heard, the perpetrators shall meet the punishment they deserve."

He turned towards the door as he spoke, but Mary desired him to pause. "Stay, stay, sir, a moment," she said: "Alice, bid the page see that the way is clear."

The young lady opened the door, and whispered a few words to the boy, who waited in the passage beyond, and who instantly proceeded to ascertain that no change had taken place to obstruct the burgher's egress from the palace. Scarcely was he gone on this errand, however, when a pale reddish glare began to pour through the open window, waxing stronger each moment; and Mary, whose face was half turned towards it, started forward, exclaiming, "Look, look! Good Heaven, they have set fire to the city!"

Albert Maurice sprang to the casement also; and, as with his right hand he threw further open the lattice, his left rested for a single moment on that of Mary of Burgundy, which she had accidentally placed upon the sill of the window. It was but for an instant, yet a thrill passed through his whole frame that made his brain seem to reel.

But he had no time to indulge such thoughts. A bright pyramid of flame was at that very moment springing up through the clear night air, affording a strange and fearful contrast to the pure sweet beams of the early moon. Redder and redder the baleful glare arose, as if striving to outshine the moonlight,

and streaming over the city, displayed the dark black masses of the buildings—wall, and roof, and tower, and spire, standing out in clear relief upon the bright background of the blaze. Thence gleaming on, the two lights were seen flashing together upon the river, amidst the innumerable black spots formed by the boats, in many of which a number of human figures might be descried, gazing with upturned faces at the flame. The wooden bridge, too, with the crossing and interlacing of its manifold piles and beams, appeared at a little distance beyond—a piece of dark fine tracery upon the glittering mass of the stream; and there, too, an immense multitude were to be observed, looking on calmly at the fire which was consuming some of the finest buildings in the city.

All this was gathered by the young citizen at one glance.

"They have set fire to the prison and the hall of justice," he cried, divining in an instant, both from the direction of the flames, and the cries he had before heard, the crime which had been committed. "This must be put a stop to! Madam, farewell. When you shall hear to-morrow of the events of this night, you shall either learn that I am dead, or that I have done my duty."

The page had by this time returned; and Albert Maurice followed him with a rapid step through the same passages by which he had been conducted to his interview with the Princess. Just as they reached the ground floor of the castle, however, there was the sound of a coming step. The boy darted across the corridor in a moment, and Albert Maurice had but time to draw the cowl of his monk's gown over his head, when he was encountered by the Lord of Imbercourt, advancing with a hasty step towards the apartments of the Princess.

The young citizen, with all his feelings excited by what had just passed, was both fearless and careless of any mortal thing, and, making slight way for the nobleman to pass, was striding rapidly on after the page; but Imbercourt caught him by the arm, exclaiming, "Who are you, sir? and what do you here?"

"I do the errand on which I am sent," replied the young citizen, "and interrupt no man. Unhand me, sir; for I am not to be stayed."

"Not till I see your face," said Imbercourt, sternly; "your voice I should know. But that form, I doubt me, is no monk's."

As he spoke, he raised his hand towards the cowl which

covered the head of the young citizen. But Albert Maurice shook off his grasp in a moment, saying, "Man, you are unwise! Stay me further at your peril."

"Ho! a guard without there!" shouted the Lord of Imbercourt, till the whole passages rang, and cast himself immediately in the path of the burgher. But Albert Maurice seized him in his powerful grasp, and, with one effort sent him reeling to the further part of the corridor, where he fell almost stunned upon the floor.

Without a moment's pause, the young citizen darted through the door by which the page had disappeared, traced without difficulty the passages which led to the postern, passed un questioned by the sentry who was conversing with the boy, and, in a moment after, was standing upon the terrace without the palace walls.

Casting off the monk's gown, he rolled it hastily up and threw it into the water; and then striding along the narrow quay, between the Cours du Prince and the river, he directed his way at once towards the bridge. It was still covered with people; and some one, recognising him as he came upon it, pronounced his name, which was instantly spoken by a hundred other voices. Still Albert Maurice passed on, forcing his way through the crowd, but marking attentively the various countenances, as he went, by the light which the flames of the burning buildings cast upon them. There were many he recognised, but he spoke to none for some moments, till he came to a stout honest-looking clothworker, near whom he stopped for an instant.

"Are you ready to obey my commands, Gibelin?" he demanded.

"To the death, Master Albert," replied the other; "the rogues have set fire to the hall of justice."

"I see," answered Albert Maurice; "follow me thither, and, as you go, collect as many as you can who will obey without question."

He then strode on, stopping from time to time at the various crowds, wherever he recognised a person on whom he could depend. With each of these, a momentary conversation took place, of the same nature as that which he had held with the man he called Gibelin. To some, however, his address was much more brief. To others, merely, "Follow me, Kold! follow me, Gastner!"

His commands were instantly obeyed; those whom he charged to collect more, were successful in doing so; and as he made his way forward, a body of two or three hundred men, gathered in this manner from the different crowds, continued pushing their way after him in an irregular manner, up the great street, in which the old prison and hall of justice were situated. Those buildings had been built so as to retire a little from the general façade of the houses; and, being placed exactly opposite to each other, left a sort of square between them. The edifices on both sides were now on fire; but notwithstanding the intense heat, the place or square was filled to overflowing with people, whose appearance and occupation seemed altogether those of devils in human form. The blaze of the burning buildings cast upon their swarthy and excited countenances — disfigured as they already were by drink and passion — a glare that was perfectly infernal. Loud shouts of exultation, or rather screams of triumphant hatred, rent the air: and, round about the square, suspended by the neck to the long stone water-spouts which then distinguished the city of Ghent, were to be seen a number of human figures, quivering and convulsed in the agonies of death, while the demon yells of the populace hailed the contortions of their victims with horrible delight.

Such, it is well known, was the death of the unhappy eschevins, whom Charles of Burgundy had appointed for the city of Ghent; but the vengeance which was immediately taken on some of the perpetrators of that cruel act is not so generally recorded. Albert Maurice found the multitude in the first exultation of the barbarous feat they had committed; and many of those who had taken a leading part therein were still making a parade of their activity. The young citizen, however, hesitated not a moment; but striding up to a wretch who held the end of one of the ropes used as the means of inflicting death upon the eschevins, he seized him at once by the collar of his jerkin, and dragged him towards the middle of the square.

A momentary movement was made by the people to resent this interference, and to rescue their comrade; but he was instantly passed from the hands of Albert Maurice to the trustworthy followers whom he had called together, with the words, "To the town-house!" The next moment the young citizen, without appearing even to see, or notice the threatening aspect of the people, again strode through the midst of them, and made

another prisoner of a better class, thundering no measured terms of reproach upon him as he cast him back into the hands of those that followed. The multitude now perceived that amongst themselves, in every part of the square, there were persons of their own rank and appearance, acting with the young burgher, whose name — never mentioned by any of the citizens without respect and applause — also began to circulate rapidly amongst them. Even those most bent upon evil, not knowing who was prepared to support, and who to oppose them, lost confidence in themselves. Fear, the most contagious of all diseases, seized them; and, one by one, they made their way from the scene of their criminal excesses. Those on the outside of the mass felt those within pressing to escape, and catching the alarm, began to run also; so that in a few minutes, Albert Maurice, and the men who had followed him, alone remained in the square, together with three prisoners, while a fourth had been hurried away.

To cut down the bodies of the unhappy men who had become the victims of popular fury was the proceeding of the burgher and his companions; but as all aid in their case was found to be in vain, the attention of Albert Maurice was soon turned to prevent the conflagration from spreading further than the public buildings to which it had been communicated. As they were very much isolated in their situation, this object was easily effected; and, as soon as it was accomplished, the young citizen proceeded with hasty steps towards the town-house, where he found a number of the municipal officers in somewhat lengthy debate concerning the measures to be pursued for tranquillizing the city. The superior mind of Albert Maurice instantly brought all wordy discussions to an end; and while armed parties of the burgher guard were despatched with peremptory orders to disperse the crowds, the attention of those who now ruled in Ghent was called to the case of the ruffians taken red-handed in the crime they had committed. The ancient laws of the city were hastily consulted; were found to be conclusive in regard to their guilt and punishment; a confessor was summoned; and, ere daybreak the next morning, the four persons who had acted the most prominent part in the death of the eschevins had tasted the same fate before the town-hall of Ghent.

With a sternness which formed no part of his original nature, but which grows sadly and destructively upon the human heart

in such scenes of excitement and violence, Albert Maurice with his own eyes saw the decree of the municipal council carried into effect ere he trod his way homeward. But as soon as the execution was over, he returned to his dwelling; and, exhausted with all he had gone through during the last eight and forty hours, he cast himself upon his bed, and slept.

CHAPTER XXIII.

We must now, once more, change the scene; and, leaving Ghent to proceed step by step through all the mazes of anarchy and confusion, which are sure for a time to succeed the overthrow of established authority, we must trace the events which were occurring to some of the other personages connected with this true history.

Once more, then, let us turn to the forest of Hannut, which now, in the depth of winter, offered a very different scene from that which it had displayed either in the full summer or the brown autumn. It was early in the morning of the 20th of January; and, except on the scattered beeches which, mingling here and there with the oak, and the elm, and the birch, retained their crisp brown leaves longer than any of the other trees, not a bough in the wood, but, stript of all that ornamented it in the warmer season, was encrusted with a fine white coating of glistening frost-work. Little snow, indeed, covered the ground, and that which had fallen was too hard frozen to have any tenacity, but—drifted about the forest in a fine white powder, lodged here and there amongst the withered leaves, or collected in thick sweeps upon the dingle side—it retained no form but that given to it by the wind; so that the deep foot-print of the stag or boar was effaced almost as soon as made, and the only mark by which the eye of the most experienced huntsman could have traced the lair of his quarry, would have been by the hoar frost brushed off the boughs of the thickets in the animal's course through the wood.

The morning was as clear and bright as if the sun were just starting from the dark pavilion of the night, to run his race

of glory through the long course of a summer's day, but the wind, whistling keenly through the woods, and tingling on the cheeks of the early forester, told that the sharp reign of winter was in the height of its power.

In a wide, open, grassy spot, about half a mile from the high road to Louvain, were collected, on the morning to which I refer, about a dozen of our good friends the green riders. One or two were on horseback; but the greater part had dismounted, and were employing themselves in all the various ways which men devise to warm themselves on a winter's morning. They were evidently waiting for some one; and though the people who are watched for by such gentry, are not generally in the most enviable situation in the world, yet, on the present occasion, the freebooters seemed to have no hostile purpose in view, and spoke of the person they expected as one of themselves.

"Cold work he will have of it, Master Matthew," said one of the adventurers, addressing the florid, white-haired old man, whom we have had occasion to notice somewhat particularly in the cavern.

"By my faith!" replied the other, "when anything disagreeable is to be done, he does not spare himself."

"Ay, but such is the leader for us," rejoined the other. "Think you he will be long? It is mighty cold, and the horses are half frozen."

"Hark!" cried his companion; "that clatter may answer your question. By the Lord! he is coming down the hill at a fearful rate, for so slippery as it is. I trust he is not pursued. Stand to your arms, my men, and be ready to mount!"

As he spoke, the sound of a horse's feet at full gallop was heard through the clear frosty air; and, in a moment after, along the little road—which wound away from the open space where the adventurers were collected over the side of a steep acclivity—was seen a man on horseback, darting down towards them, without the slightest apparent regard to the sharpness of the descent, or the slipperiness of the road. He was armed like themselves, but with the distinction, that instead of the open basinet, or round steel cap, without visor, which they wore, his head was covered by a plumed casque, the beaver of which was down.

He drew not a rein till he was in the midst of them; then, with one slight touch, checked his horse and vaulted to the

ground. The haste in which he had arrived was now equalled by the rapidity of his words, as he gave a number of different orders to the men who surrounded him, clearly and precisely, but with a celerity which showed that no time was to be lost.

"Matthew, my good lieutenant," he said, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the old man, "who is fittest to send to Germany, on an errand to a prince?"

"Why not myself?" demanded the adventurer.

"Because I want you here, and cannot do without you," replied the chief.

"Well, then, send Walter there," rejoined the old man; "he is a Frenchman, and courtly in his way."

"Courtly, and honest, too," added the Vert Gallant, "which is a wonder. There, Master Walter, take that letter to the Bishop of Triers. You will find him at Cologne with the bishop of that city. There, mount and be gone! you know your way. Here is a purse of gold to pay your expenses. The bishop will send you on to the archduke. The Germans are frugal—therefore be not you over fine. Yet spare not the florins, where it may do honour to him that sent you.—Away!

"You, good Matthew, yourself," continued the Vert Gallant, "speed like lightning to Ghent; but cast off your steel jacket, and robe me yourself like the good burgher of a country town. Seek out your old friend Martin Fruse: confer with him, and with his nephew Albert Maurice; they are now all-powerful in Ghent. Bid them beware of Louis King of France. Tell them it is his purpose to force the Princess Mary into a marriage with his puny son, and to make her yield her fair lands into his hand, that he himself may seize them all when death lays hold upon his sickly boy. Bid them oppose it by all means, but by none more than by delay. Risk not your person, however; and if you cannot speak with them in safety, write down the message, and have it given by another hand. You, Frank Van Halle—you are bold and shrewd, though you have but little speech: follow Matthew Gournay, habited as his man; but when you are within the walls of Ghent, find out some way of speech with the princess; and, whether in public or in private, give her that ring, with this small slip of paper. Then leave the city as quickly as you may."

"I doubt me it will be sure death?" replied Van Halle, looking up with an inquiring glance.

"What! you afraid, Van Halle!" exclaimed his leader, "but go, there is no fear."

"Afraid? No, no," answered the man; "but I only thought, if I were to die, I would go home first, and, with Martin of Gravelines and Dick Drub the Devil, would drink out the pipe of sack I bought;—pity it should be wasted."

"Keep it for another time," said the Vert Gallant, "for, by my faith, your errand to Ghent will never stop your drinking it."

"Well, well; if I die, tell the other two to finish it," rejoined Van Halle; "pity it should be wasted;" and so sprang on his horse.

"Hold, Matthew," cried the Vert Gallant, as the two soldiers were about to depart without more words; "meet me five days hence in the wood between Swynaerde and Deynse. So lose no time. You know the red cross near Astene."

The two instantly rode off; and the Vert Gallant then turned to the others, and continued his orders, for marching the whole force he had under his command—which seemed to be considerable—into the woods in the neighbourhood of Ghent.

Those woods, though then very extensive, and covering acres of ground which are now in rich cultivation, were nevertheless too small to afford perfect shelter and concealment for such a large body of adventurers as had long tenanted the vaster and less frequented forest-tracks near Hannut, unless the entire band were subdivided into many smaller ones, and distributed through various parts of the country. All this, however, was foreseen and arranged by the leader of the free companions; and it is probable that he also trusted to the distracted state of the country—throughout which anything like general police was, for the time, at an end—for perfect immunity in his bold advance to the very gates of the capital of Flanders.

All his orders were speedily given, and one by one his companions left him, as they received their instructions, so that at length he stood alone. He paused for a moment on the spot, patting the neck of his strong fiery horse; and,—as men will sometimes do when they fancy themselves full of successful designs, and are excited by the expectation of great events,—addressing to the nearest object of the brute creation those secret outbreakings of the heart, which he might have feared to trust in the unsafe charge of human beings.

"Now, my bold horse, now," he exclaimed, "the moment is come, for which, during many a long year, I have waited and watched! The star of my house is once more in the ascendant, and the reign of tyranny is at an end—let him who dares, stand between me and my right, for not another hour will I pause till justice is fully done."

While he was thus speaking, a sort of slight distant murmur came along, so mingled with the whistling of the wind, that he had to listen for some moments before he could ascertain whether it proceeded merely from the increased waving of the boughs occasioned by the gale rising, or whether it was the distant sound of a number of persons travelling along the road which he had just passed.

He was soon satisfied; and as he clearly distinguished voices, and the jingling tramp of a travelling party of that day, he sprang upon his charger, leaped him over a small brook that trickled half-congealed through the grass, and plunged into a deep thicket beyond, the bushes and trees of which were of sufficient height to screen him from the observation of the passengers.

The party whose tongues he had heard soon came to the spot where he had lately stood. It comprised about thirty people, all well armed, and dressed splendidly, bearing the straight cross, which at that time distinguished France from Burgundy. The magnificent apparel of the whole body, the number of the men-at-arms, of which it was principally composed, together with certain signs of peaceful dispositions on their own part, evinced at once, to the practised eye that watched them, that the cavalcade which came winding along the road consisted of some envoy from France and his escort; furnished, probably, with those letters of safe-conduct which guarded them from any hostile act on the part of the government of the country through which they passed, but prepared to resist any casual attacks from the lawless bands that were then rife.

Not exactly at the head of the cavalcade,—for two stout archers, armed at all points, led the way,—but at the head of the principal body, appeared a small, dark, ill-featured man, whose person, even an extraordinary display of splendour in his apparel, sufficed not to render anything but what it was, insignificant. Velvet and gold and nodding plumes could do nought in his favour; and the only thing which made his appearance in any degree remarkable, was an air of silent, calm, and determined

cunning, which had in it something fearful from its very intensity. One gazed upon him as on a serpent, which, however small and powerless in appearance, inspires terror in much mightier things than itself, from the venom of its fangs.

He rode on quietly, speaking little to any one; and that which he did say was all uttered in a calm, soft, insinuating tone, which corresponded well with the expression of his countenance. The rest of the party laughed and talked with much less ceremony and restraint than the presence of so dignified a person as an ambassador might have required, had he been by state and station fit to have inspired respect. Such seemed not to be the case in the present instance; and though not one word on any other than the most common-place subjects passed amongst the followers of the Count de Meulan,—for so the ambassador was called,—yet their light laughter and gay jokes, breaking forth every moment close to his ear, were anything but reverential.

Some little difficulty seemed now to occur in regard to the road that the party were travelling. It appeared that hitherto, on turning slightly from the high road, they had followed the foot-marks of the Vert Gallant's charger; taking them for those left by the horse of an avant-courier, who had been despatched to prepare for them at the next town. When they found, however, that the steps turned into the savannah, and lost themselves in a number of others, a halt immediately took place; and, after a short consultation, by order of the ambassador, the whole party wheeled round, and wisely returned to the high road.

Their whole proceedings, however, had been watched by one they knew not of; and almost before they were out of sight, the Vert Gallant emerged from his concealment, and, with a laugh which rang with contempt, turned his horse's head and galloped away.

The Count de Meulan—or, in other words, Olivier le Dain, the barber of Louis XI., whom that monarch had raised from the lowest class for the basest qualities, and whom he now sent as ambassador, to treat with the young heiress of Burgundy, and to intrigue with her subjects—had hardly proceeded two hours on the high road, when a fat rolling monk of the order of St. Francis, mounted on a sleek mule, the picture of himself, joined the rear of the ambassador's escort, and entering into jovial conversation with some of the men-at-arms, besought their leave to travel as far as they went on the road to Ghent under their protection,

alleging that the country was in such a disturbed state, that even a poor brother like himself could not pursue his journey in any safety. The light-hearted Frenchmen easily granted his request, observing, in an under tone to each other, that Oliver the Devil, —such was the familiar cognomen of the respectable personage they followed — could not in all conscience travel without a monk in his train.

Father Barnabas, whom we have seen before, no sooner found himself added to the suite of the ambassador, than he displayed all those qualities he well knew would make his society agreeable to the men-at-arms who had given him protection; and by many a jolly carouse, and many a licentious bacchanalian song, he soon won favour on all hands. Even the barber Count himself, whose more sensual propensities were only restrained by his cunning, found no fault with the merry friar, whose sly and cutting jests, combined with the sleek and quiet look of stupidity which always accompanied them, found means to draw up even his lip into a smile, that might have been mistaken for a sneer. On one occasion he felt disposed to put some shrewd questions to worthy Father Barnabas as to his situation and pursuits, and even began to do so on the second night of their journey, as, occupying the best seat by the fire in the little hostelrie at which they lodged, he eyed the impenetrable fat countenance before him with the sort of curiosity one feels to pry into anything that we see will be difficult to discover.

But the monk was at least his match; and if the weapons with which they engaged in the keen contest of their wits were not precisely the same on both parts, the combat resembled that of the elephant and the rhinoceros,—whenever Oliver the wicked strove to seize the monk and close with him, his antagonist ran under him and gored him. Thus, when, by some casual words, the envoy thought he had discovered that his companion was a native of Saarvelt, and suddenly put the question to him at once, the other replied,—"No, no; I only remember it well, on account of a barber's boy who was there, and whose real name was—pho! I forget his real name; but he is a great man now-a-days, and has held a basin under the nose of a king."

The quiet, unconscious manner in which this was said, left Olivier le Dain, with all his cunning, in doubt, whether the jolly friar really recognised in him the barber's boy of Saarvelt, or whether the allusion had been merely accidental; but he resolved

not to interrogate any more a person of such a memory, and possibly determined to take care that the most effectual stop should be put to its exercise in future, if those plans regarding Ghent should prove successful, in the execution of which he was now engaged.

Too wise, however, to show any harshness towards the monk at the time,—a proceeding which would have pointed home the sarcasm for his men-at-arms, on whose faces he thought he had remarked a sneering smile as the other spoke,—he allowed good Father Barnabas still to travel under his escort, meditating a lesson for him when he arrived at his journey's end, which some might have thought severe. In the meantime, as they journeyed on, there was about the monk a sort of subdued triumph—a self-satisfied chuckle in his laugh, especially when he jested with the gay and boasting Frenchmen upon their arms and their exploits—which occasionally wakened a suspicion in the mind of Olivier le Dain, whose own conduct was far too crooked for him to believe that any one else could act straightforwardly.

Still no danger appeared; and the party arrived in perfect safety, within about four leagues of Ghent. There, after pausing for supper at an inn, it was found, on preparing to resume their journey, and enter the city that night, that the person who had hitherto guided them was so drunk as hardly to be able to sit his horse. The ambassador demanded a guide of the host, but none could be found; and the worthy keeper of the inn answered, with true Flemish coolness, that he would not spare any one of his own household. "Could not the monk guide them?" he demanded. "If his eyes served him, he had seen his broad face in that part of the world before."

"Ay, marry can I, my son," replied Father Barnabas; "but I offer no service before it is asked. There is a proverb against it, man."

As the affairs he had to transact were of deep importance, and minutes were of the utmost consequence to success, Olivier le Dain, though by no means fond of riding at night, and not at all prepossessed in favour of the monk, consented to accept him as a guide; and the party accordingly set out. By a whispered arrangement between the respectable Count de Meulan and the captain of his escort, however, a large part of the armed attendants rode on at a sufficient distance before, to enable Oliver to

make his retreat if he heard any attack upon this advanced guard; while the monk, riding between two troopers, close to the worthy barber, was held as a sort of hostage for the security of the road, on which he was about to pilot them.

Father Barnabas, whether he perceived anything strange in this array or not, made no opposition, and jogged on contentedly upon his mule, chattering gaily as he went, and seasoning his discourse with various choice allusions to barbers, and basins, and beards, much more to the gratification of the men-at-arms than of Olivier le Dain.

Thus proceeded the cavalcade, till they reached the little wood of Swynaerde, near Merebek, where the road from Alost, in ancient days, crossed the Scheldt, over a wooden bridge, at which a certain pontage was charged upon each horse that passed. Here the mind of the barber ambassador was in some degree relieved, by hearing from the toll-taker, that all was quite quiet and safe, though six good miles still lay between him and Ghent, and that through a dark wood of tall trees. At the distance of about a mile from the bridge, was a red cross, marking the direction of four different roads, which there intersected each other; and the whole party paused—as it was too dark to read the information thereon inscribed—to receive the instructions of the monk.

"Straight on! straight on!" cried Father Barnabas;—and the first part of the escort moved forward, though somewhat nearer to the rest of the body than before; but the moment they had again resumed their march, there was a low, sharp whistle, and a sound of rushing and rustling all around them. Olivier le Dain, who was already following the van, drew in his rein; and the whistle, repeated a thousand times in different parts of the wood round about, showed him at once that his party was beset. Fear certainly was the predominant feeling in his mind; but even that very absorbing sensation did not banish a passion equally strong: and while he turned his horse's head to fly back to the bridge with all speed, he did not fail to say, in a voice but little changed from its ordinary calm and sustained tone,—"We are betrayed! Kill the monk!"

But both Oliver's purpose of escape, and his desire of vengeance, were disappointed. At the very first whistle, the friar had slipped, unperceived, from his sleek mule, and, passing under the animal's belly, was no longer to be seen; and before

the luckless ambassador could reach the road, which led away to the bridge, he found it occupied by armed men. To whichever side he turned, the same sight presented itself; and even on the highway leading to Ghent a still stronger party was interposed between him and the first division of his escort. Thus then he remained in the midst of the open square of the cross road, accompanied by about twelve attendants, and surrounded by a body of adventurers, which could not consist of less than one or two hundred, but which fear and darkness magnified into a much greater number.

The scene and situation were by no means pleasant. Not a sound was to be heard, but the echo of horses' feet ringing over the hard frozen ground,—from which he justly inferred that the advanced party of his escort, by whom he was neither loved nor respected, finding themselves infinitely overmatched, had galloped off, leaving him to his fate;—and nothing was to be seen in the darkness of the night, but the black trunks of the trees, slightly relieved by the colour of the ground, which was covered by a thin drift of snow, while a number of dim human forms appeared, occupying all the different roads; and a multitude of faint, dull spots of fire, drawn in a complete circle round him, showed the ambassador that the slow matches of the arquebusiers, into whose hands he had fallen, were prepared against resistance.

For a moment or two not a word was spoken; but at length a voice not far from him exclaimed, "Lord a' mercy! Only to think of the barber's boy of Saarvelt coming ambassador to Ghent! Lack a day! lack a day, Noll! lack a day! thou art become a mighty great man! Thou hast lathered and shaved to some purpose, ha, ha, ha!" And the voice of the monk was drowned in his own laughter, the contagious merriment of whose thick plum-porridge sounds, instantly affected all around; and the whole forest rang and echoed to the peals.

"What would you, fair sirs?" demanded the soft silken tones of Olivier le Dain. "If laughter be all you seek, laugh on; but let me pass upon my way. If it be gold you want, there, take my purse; I make you welcome to it."

"A fool and his money!" cried the monk, snatching the purse. "But, 'faith! Master Noll, the barber, it is generous of you to give, what you cannot keep unless we like it."

"Cease your fooling, monk!" said the stern voice of some

one advancing from the wood. "Get off your horse, Sir Barber; you shall know my pleasure with you, when it suits me to tell it. And now answer me! How dare you, a low mechanical slave, presume to undertake a mission to the Duchess of Burgundy, without one drop of noble blood in your veins?"

"Your pardon, fair sir!" replied Oliver, dismounting slowly, and standing in an attitude of deprecation before the tall commanding figure by whom he was addressed;—"your pardon; I was rendered noble by my sovereign lord the king, for the very purpose, as his letters patent will show."

"Faith! the letters patent must be miraculous ones, that could ennoble one drop of your slave's blood," replied the Vert Gallant. "There, take him away!—Treat him not ill; but keep him safe and fast. Search his person, his servants, and his sumpter horses. Examine well the stuffings of the saddles, and the paddings of their coats; and bring every paper and parchment you may find."

"But listen to me, fair sir! Only hear me!" entreated Olivier le Dain. "Surely you will not show such treatment to an ambassador. My papers and my person are sacred in every Christian land."

"Pshaw!" cried the Vert Gallant. "When Louis, King of France, so far forgets what is due to a princess, as to send to the heiress of Burgundy a mean, cunning barber, as an ambassador, he can only expect that others will also forget the character with which he chooses to invest his lackey. Besides, what is it to me that you are ambassador to Burgundy? You are no ambassador to me. I am duke of the forests; and when you come as envoy to me, you shall have forest cheer. Away with him and do my bidding!"

Closely guarded, but well treated, Olivier le Dain and his attendants were detained for some days in the woods near Ghent, during the greater part of which time, though occasionally compelled to sleep in a hut of boughs, they resided generally in a small lonely house, which had belonged in former days to the forester.

At length, one morning, suddenly, while the twilight was still grey, the ambassador and his followers were called from their repose, and placed upon the horses which brought them. All their apparel and jewels were restored, as well as their arms; and of the treasure, which the barber had brought with him, for

the purpose of bribing the populace of Ghent, a sufficient portion was left in his possession, to maintain his dignity, but not to effect the object he had intended.

He was then told to proceed upon his way, for that he was free to come or go; and with all speed he turned his rein towards Ghent, at which place he arrived in safety, though seven days after the period that had been fixed for his appearance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In the meantime, many events had occurred within the walls of the city of Ghent, of which some account must be given, though perhaps it may be necessary to follow the same desultory course in which they are related in shrewd old Philip de Commines and pompous Jean de Molinet.

The quelled tumult, the extinguished fire, and the prompt justice done upon some of the incendiaries, spread in a thousand shapes through the town; and as, whenever Fame has marked a hero for her own, she never fails to load him with many more honours than his due, Albert Maurice had soon acquired the reputation of a thousand miracles of skill, and courage, and judgment, far beyond the acts he had really performed. Thus, when, after a brief sleep and a hasty meal, he issued forth from his house the next morning, and rode on to the town-house, he found the people—on whose wrath for their thwarted passions he had fully counted—ready, on the contrary, to shout gratulations and plaudits on his path. At the town-house, the syndics and notables of all the trades had already assembled, and the druggist Ganay was in the very act of proposing that an address of thanks and applause should be voted to the young burgher for his noble and courageous conduct of the preceding evening. Albert Maurice, however, was not to be blinded; and even when the druggist was declaiming vehemently against the outrages of the foregoing night, and lamenting that the populace had dealt upon the eschevins without due judgment by law, the eye of the young citizen fixed upon him with a glance of keen reproach, which Ganay at once translated, and translated rightly —"You have deceived me."

To have done so, however, was no matter of shame to the dark and artful man who was speaking; and, as their eyes met, a slight smile of triumphant meaning curled his lip, while, with a fresh burst of eloquence, he called upon the assembly to testify their admiration of the man who had saved the city from pillage and conflagration. The address of thanks was carried by acclamation; and Albert Maurice soon found that it was the determination of the more active part of the citizens, under the immediate influence of Ganay, to carry forward, with eager rapidity, all those bold measures which would deprive the sovereigns of any real power for the future, and place it entirely in the hands of the people—or rather, in the hands of whatever person had courage, energy, and talent, to snatch it from their grasp, and retain it in his own. Twenty-six eschevins, together with the lieutenant-bailli, and three pensioners, were immediately elected by the citizens, to replace those who had been massacred, and to administer the law; but the grand bailli and chief pensioner were still to be chosen, and Albert Maurice with surprise heard the determination of the citizens to confound those two high offices in his own person. From the body of magistrates, three persons were selected, as a president and two consuls, as they were called, and extraordinary powers were entrusted to them. The president named at once was the chief officer of the city, Albert Maurice; and Ganay, the druggist, was added as one of the consuls. The third office was not so easily filled; and a strong attempt was made to raise to it a fierce and brutal man, whose talents perhaps appeared greater than they really were, from the total want of any of the restraints of feeling and moral principle, to limit the field in which they were exercised.

Some one, however, luckily proposed the name of worthy Martin Fruse; and his nomination, seconded by the eloquent voice of his nephew, was instantly acquiesced in by all. A slight cloud passed over the brow of the druggist, as he found his power likely to be counterbalanced by the influence of one, who, if he possessed no other quality to render him great, had at least that rectitude of feeling, which was a fearful stumbling-block in the way of crooked designs. But unchangeable determination of purpose, and unscrupulous exercise of means, had rendered the druggist so often successful in things which seemed hopeless, that he bore, with scarcely a care, any change of

circumstances, confident of finding some path to his object in the end.

After one of those noisy and tumultuous assemblies, in the course of which, though no business is transacted with calm reason, an infinity of acts are performed by impulse, the meeting at the town-house broke up; and while Martin Fruse returned to his dwelling on foot, as was his usual custom, Albert Maurice and the druggist mounted their horses, and rode slowly homeward. Their conversation was long and rapid—too long, indeed, for transcription here; but the commencement of it must not be omitted, even for the sake of brevity.

"Ganay, you have deceived me!" said Albert Maurice, as soon as they were in some degree free from the crowd.

"I have!" was the calm reply of the druggist. "You are ungrateful, Albert. You have never thanked me for it. What, you would pretend you do not see cause for thanks! Had not the populace taken it into their own hands, the council must have condemned those foul vultures who have so long preyed upon us. Ay, I say *must;* and then whose name, but that of Albert Maurice, must have stood amongst others in the order for their death? As I have managed it, the severity was no act of yours. You have offended none—no, not even the princess; and, on the contrary, you have had the means of adding, in one night, more to your fame, than your whole life has won before. You have had an opportunity of winning honour and respect from commons and from nobles, and love and gratitude from Mary of Burgundy. Still farther, have you not in one night, in consequence of acts with which you accuse me almost as a crime—have you not climbed to the very height of power in your native land?—ay, I say the height of power, for who is there, be he duke, or count, or prince, who has so much authority as he who sways the power of all the people of Flanders? A few steps more, and your hand may seize the——"

"The what?" demanded Albert Maurice, as the other paused.

"No matter," replied the druggist. "The gates of ambition are cast wide open before you; and you must on, whether you will or not."

"Ha! and who shall force me?" demanded Albert Maurice.

"Fate!—Destiny!" answered the druggist. "'Tis many years ago, and you were then a mere boy; but I remember your fate was predicted in the forest of Hannut by that gloomy

lord whose only commune, for many a year, had been with the bright stars. 'Twas one night when we fell accidentally into the hands of the free companions—and he foretold that you should go on from power to power, successfully through life; and that no one should check you but yourself."

"And do *you* believe in such vain dreams?" rejoined Albert Maurice.

"I believe," replied the druggist, gravely, "that our lot through life is immutably fixed from the cradle to the grave; that like a wild horse we may foam and plunge, or like a dull jade plod onward at a foot pace—but that the firm rider, Fate, still spurs us on upon the destined course; and when the stated goal is won, casts down the bridle on our neck, and leaves us to repose. I believe, too, that the stars, as well as many other things, may tell, to those who study them, events to come; for depend upon it, everything throughout the universe fits closely, like the blocks cut for a perfect arch; so that, from the form and position of the neighbouring stones, a person, who has deeply studied, may tell to a certainty the shape and size of any other."

Albert Maurice mused for a moment over the confession of this strange creed, and its illustration, and then demanded,—"What did the old lord say concerning me?"

The druggist repeated his former words; and his young companion again mused for a brief space. Then suddenly bringing back the conversation to the matter in which it arose, he repeated,—"Ganay, you have deceived me; and not for my interest, but for your own revenge. You have worked your will; and I trust that you are now sated. Better for us both to labour together as far as may be, than stand in the very outset face to face as foes. Are you contented with the blood already shed?"

"There must be one more!" said the druggist, resolutely.

"And who do you aim at now?" demanded the young citizen, with no small loathing and horror towards his companion; but yet with a conviction that, by some means, he would accomplish his purpose.

"It matters not," replied Ganay; "but set your mind at ease. The man to whom I point is less an enemy to myself than an enemy to the state; and I give you my promise that I will practise nought against his life but with your consent. So guilty is he, and so convinced shall you be of his guilt, that your

own hand shall sign the warrant for his death. But, oh! Albert Maurice, if you believe that the blood shed last night is all that must be shed to effect the purposes you seek, sadly, sadly do you deceive yourself. Prepare to bid it flow like water, or betake you to a monastery! Ambition joined to faint-hearted pity, is like a tame lion at a show, led about by a woman."

"But there is such a thing as patriotism," rejoined Albert Maurice;—yet he named the virtue but faintly, compared with the tone in which he would have mentioned it three days before.

"Ay," said the druggist; "patriotism! The first step to ambition—but that stage is past."

Well did Ganay know that there exists no means of persuading a human being to any course of action, so powerful as by convincing him it is inevitable. To do so, however, there must be probability as a basis; and Ganay had watched too closely the most minute turns of his companion's behaviour during many months, not to divine the spark of ambition lying half smothered at the bottom of his heart. Nor had the effect of Mary of Burgundy's eyes upon the colour and the voice of Albert Maurice been lost upon the keen spirit that followed him; and he fancied he beheld an easy method of bending him to his own purpose. He saw, indeed, that, if either by love, or any other means, he succeeded in fanning that spark of ambition into a flame, he must leave him to run his course without a struggle, or a hope to deprive him of the prize; nay, that he must aid him with his whole cunning to raise up a new authority in the land, on the basis of that which they were about to overthrow. But Ganay was not ambitious of aught but avarice and revenge; and he soon perceived that these two master passions of his soul *must* be gratified by Albert Maurice in his ascent to power.

As he rode on, he spoke long of their future prospects. He cast away, at once, the enthusiastic cant he had at one time assumed towards him, of patriotism and the entire abnegation of self; and, in order to habituate his mind fully to the dreams of ambition, he spoke of them as things already determined and to be. But still, to smooth the transition, he failed not to point out the mighty benefits that a ruler with a truly liberal heart might confer upon his people—it mattered not what he was called—governor, lord, duke, prince, or king. As for a pure republic, the land was not yet in a state fit for it, he said: but what a boon—a mighty boon—might not that man grant to the whole

world, who, starting up from amongst the people, were to rule them for their own happiness alone, and to show to other monarchs the immense advantages of such a sway.

"But if you speak of this land," replied Albert Maurice, in whose heart he had discovered the unfortified spot,—"but if you speak of this land, how can any man so start up, without tearing her inheritance from the gentlest, the noblest of beings?"

"By one means alone," answered Ganay, in a grave, decided tone; "by uniting her fate with his own."

Albert Maurice, thrown off his guard by so bold and straightforward an allusion to that which was passing in his own heart, suddenly drew in his rein, and glanced his eye over the countenance of the druggist, to see if there were no sneer at the presumption of his very dreams, hidden beneath the calm tone which the other assumed. But all was tranquil, and even stern; and, after a momentary pause, the young burgher replied, though with a flushed and burning cheek,—"If—as we know her to be—she is so gentle, and noble, and kind-hearted, as you admit, why not leave her to rule her hereditary lands by the dictates of her generous will?"

"What! before a year be over," cried Ganay, "to give her hand, and with it the wealth, and welfare, and happiness of her people, to some of the proud tyrants under which the country groans—or, at the instigation of her intriguing ministers, to bestow the whole upon some foreign prince, who will come amongst us without one sympathy, to grind into the dust the stranger subjects given him like serfs, as a part of his wife's portion!—Is this what you would have?"

Albert Maurice was silent, but not so Ganay; and as they proceeded, with poisonous eloquence he poured forth every argument, to show both the necessity and the facility of the course he suggested. He cited Artevelde, as an instance of what talented ambition had accomplished in that very city, and in an age when all the institutions of feudal pride were a thousandfold stricter than they had since become. He depicted him, now a lackey in a noble house in France, and then a mead-brewer in Ghent, and then a popular leader, and then a companion of kings, seated beside the conquering and accomplished Edward of England, treating as a prince with Philip of France, waging war at the head of mighty armies, and balancing the fate

of Europe by his power. He had fallen, at length, he said, it was true; but he had fallen by his vices and his follies; and as far as virtues, talents, courage, or accomplishments, went, could Artevelde compete, for one hour, with the man to whom he then spoke. The one was a lackey, risen from the lowest order of the state, the other sprang from the highest class of the burghers of the first commercial city in the north of Europe;—burghers who already ranked almost with nobility, and who, in fact, should rank far higher.

With the skill of a practised musician, whose finger lights with nice precision on all the tones and half tones of his instruments, Ganay found means to touch every feeling in the bosom of the young burgher, and make every chord vibrate with the sound that he desired. True it is, indeed, that the heart of Albert Maurice was not one to have been thus worked upon, had not the feelings been already there; and the task of his companion,—an easy one in comparison,—was merely to excite those feelings into stronger action.

At length they reached the door of his own dwelling; and Albert Maurice alighted from his horse, without asking the druggist to do so too. But Ganay rode on contented; for he saw that he had given the young citizen matter for thoughts which sought to be indulged in private, and he desired no better. Nor had his words failed to sink deep. Albert Maurice, indeed, passed rapidly over, in his own mind, all the intermediate steps; but there rested behind, as a result, the proud, the inspiring conviction, that all which he chose to snatch at was within his grasp,—that in one single day he had reached a height of power, from which it was but a step to the side of Mary of Burgundy; and the conviction was a dangerous one for his virtue and his peace. Much, however, was still to be done; and he sat down to revolve all that must be attempted and effected, in order to render the daring hopes of mingled love and ambition, with which his own heart beat, a passion of the people—to crush, or scatter, or circumvent the many rivals that must and would arise—and to win the love of her, upon whose affections all his dreams were founded. For the latter object, he felt that it was necessary to bury deep in his own heart the aspirations which rose within it, till manifold communings, service, and tenderness, should have ripened the esteem, in which he saw he was held, into warmer feelings. Thus he pondered, till, before he was

aware, schemes were formed, and deeds were prepared, which all eternity could not annul.

The following days passed much in the same manner; but each day brought forward to the light some of the many difficulties with which the young citizen was destined to contend in his progress towards the great object before his eyes, but which, having calculated upon them from the first, he was prepared to meet as soon as they assumed a tangible form. During the course of the morning which followed the day of his elevation to the supreme power in the city, the levy of a large body of troops was voted, and the entire command was assigned to himself: but, before night, the Lord of Ravestein, the Duke of Cleves, and the Bishop of Liege arrived, to counsel and support the Princess; and though each came separately, their trains, united, amounted to nearly a thousand men. A wary guard, however, was held upon the gates of Ghent, and only thirty attendants were allowed to pass within the walls in company with each of the noble visiters; while, much to the discontent of their lords, the rest were sent back to their various territories.

A new scene of intrigue immediately followed the arrival of these princes in the palace; and it soon reached the ears of Albert Maurice, that the Duke of Cleves was moving heaven and earth to obtain the hand of the orphan Princess of Burgundy for his son. Almost at the same time, good Martin Fruse received intelligence, from a quarter which we already know, that Louis XI. sought to unite France and Burgundy, by an union between the heiress of Charles the Bold and his sickly child, the Dauphin; and it soon became evident, that Imbercourt and Hugonet, supported by the Lord of Ravestein, were eagerly pressing Mary to sacrifice her own feelings to the benefit of her country, and to bestow her hand upon the feeble boy.

Clear, however—most clear, it was, both to Albert Maurice and to the druggist Ganay, that while these parties contended for mastery, they must equally court the people of Ghent, and more especially must bow to the young citizen himself, whose power they all well knew, and whose designs they did not suspect. Of neither of the parties at the court did Albert Maurice at first entertain much fear; for he felt sure that the heart of Mary of Burgundy, however tutored to sacrifice her own will, would strongly revolt against either alliance,—the one with a fierce and brutal sot—the other with a sickly child. But tidings

speedily arrived, which made him fear that force or terror would soon compel the unhappy girl to yield herself to France. News now reached him that Louis was already in the field, that Picardy was full of the troops of France, and that Commines and Bourbon were advancing along the line of the Somme. An ambassador, too, he was warned at the same time, was on his way from France to Ghent; and to show the young citizen that he was sent rather to tamper with the people, than to negotiate with the Princess, or even with the municipal council, copies of his commission and instructions reached Albert Maurice from an unknown source, together with an assurance that some days would yet elapse before he could appear at the gates.

The near approach of the ambassador, whom we have already seen delayed on his journey, remained unknown in the palace; but hourly tidings were received of the progress of the French king, and of his unjust claims upon the whole inheritance of the late Duke of Burgundy. The pretences he set forth were so futile and absurd—so contrary to every principle of law or justice—that every one believed his sole object was to force the heiress of Burgundy into an immediate marriage with his son. Imbercourt, Hugonet, and all the ministers of the late duke, saw his proceedings in the same point of view, and incessantly besought the unhappy Mary to yield to her fate, and, before her dominions were entirely incorporated with France, to avert the misfortunes that must fall upon herself and her people, by yielding her hand to the Dauphin.

The same conclusion in regard to the motives of Louis XI. was drawn by the Duke of Cleves; but the result on his own conduct was totally different. Instead of beseeching Mary to yield to necessity, he opposed such advice with determined and angry vehemence. He stigmatized Hugonet and Imbercourt as traitors; and, in order to destroy the powerful party opposed to his own views in the council of the Princess, he laid himself out to court the people; rode side by side with Albert Maurice through the streets of the city, amidst the shouts of the multitude; and, after having excited the municipal body to petition that their president might have a seat in the provincial council of Flanders, he himself presented the address, which he knew that neither Mary nor her ministers dared to refuse.

Albert Maurice, however, suffered himself not to be dazzled; and though joy inexpressible thrilled at his heart at every tri-

umphant step he took in advance; though his whole soul rejoiced at the constant opportunity now afforded him of daily communication with her he dared to love; yet he allowed neither passion nor success for a moment to relax his energies or his watchfulness; and he yielded to the pretensions of the Duke of Cleves in favour of his son, only so far as might stay the precipitate haste with which the French alliance might otherwise have been concluded.

With Imbercourt he clashed continually; and the firm, calm reasoning of the minister was constantly met and overpowered by the fiery and brilliant eloquence of the young citizen. Nor was he, even in opposing her faithful and her esteemed minister, without deriving some encouragement from the eyes of Mary herself, whenever the discussion took place in her presence; for though she both loved and reverenced the wise and gallant friend of her father, who advocated, for her own interests, the proposed union with the Dauphin; yet to her heart that union was so repugnant, that she could not but look with pleasure on every one who opposed it, nor listen without delight to arguments which gave her new courage to resist.

Nor did Albert Maurice ever support the idea of her marriage with another; so that while advancing his own design, and winning both her gratitude and admiration, he was never found in opposition to her wishes; and still, when he appeared, she welcomed his coming with a smile and with a look of pleasure, which, without the slightest purpose of deceit, served painfully to deceive.

Nevertheless, the Duke of Cleves made rapid progress; and, not contented with the efforts of the young citizen to oppose the French alliance, he left no means untried to stimulate the people to support his own design. The watchful eye of Albert Maurice was indeed upon him, but still his strides towards the accomplishment of his schemes were more speedy than the other had anticipated; and the cries he heard, when riding, one day, towards the palace, of "Long live the Duke of Cleves! Long live his gallant son!" showed him at once that it was time to raise up some barrier against his pretensions. At the same time, he felt, that to give even a slight support to the opposite party might prove fatal to his hopes; and, after a long consultation with Ganay, he determined to seek out some one who might openly pretend to Mary's hand, and draw away the countenance of the

people from the Duke of Cleves; but whose pretensions would be even more repugnant, not only to herself, but to her ministers, her friends, and her nobles, than even his own might prove at an after-period. But who was to be the man?

Accompanied by the crowd of attendants, who now always followed his footsteps when he rode forth, as chief magistrate of Ghent, Albert Maurice hastened to the palace, some minutes before the council met, and was admitted to the presence of the Princess, whose smile gave him even a more glad reception than ordinary. She was not alone, however; for besides her usual train of ladies, a page, a chamberlain, and a man dressed as a peasant, but whose scarred cheek told tales of warlike broils, stood before her when he entered.

"Oh! you are most welcome, Sir President," said the Princess, "and have come to afford me counsel at a good moment. Here is a ring just returned to me, which I gave some months ago to a stranger who saved me, I believe, from death, in a thunderstorm, near Tirlemont. I promised, at the same time, that on his sending it back, I would grant whatever he might ask, if it were consistent with my honour and my dignity. Look what he says on this slip of parchment."—"He, to whom the Duchess of Burgundy gave this ring, demands, as the boon of which it was a pledge, the instant liberation of Adolphus, Duke of Gueldres, and his restoration to his own domains."

Albert Maurice almost started; for there was a strange coincidence between the demand which the Princess had just read, and the thoughts which had been passing in his mind as he rode thither. "Lady," he said, "it seems to me that there is but one counsel to be given you. Your word is plighted; the liberation of the Duke of Gueldres—monster though he be—*is* consistent with your honour and dignity; and your promise must be fulfilled."

"You always judge nobly, Sir President," replied the Princess; "and I thank you now, and ever shall thank you, for supporting that which is just and generous, however contrary it may be to apparent interests."

"Believe me, madam," replied the young citizen, bending low to conceal the joy that sparkled in his eyes,—"believe me, that it shall ever be my endeavour both to forward your best interests, and those of the country, which are, indeed, inseparable; and I would ask you as a boon, through all the future—

whatever you may see, or think strange in my demeanour—to rest assured that your good and my country's are still the motive."

"I will—I will, indeed," replied the Princess; "for it would be hard to make me suppose that you, whom I have seen act so nobly in circumstances of personal danger and difficulty, would forget your honour and integrity, when trusted by our countrymen and your sovereign."

A slight flush passed over the cheek of Albert Maurice, at such praise. It was not exactly that he knew himself undeserving of it, for he had laboured hard and successfully to convince his own mind that his aggrandizement, the welfare of the country—ay, and he almost hoped, the happiness of Mary herself—were inseparably united. He replied, however—not with words of course, for his lightest thoughts were seldom commonplace—but vaguely; and, after a few questions addressed to the man who bore the ring, which he seemed unwilling to answer, the Princess rendered her promise to liberate the Duke of Gueldres definite, and the messenger was suffered to depart.

At the meeting of the council, which followed immediately, the matter was discussed and concluded, and the orders to set the Duke at liberty were instantly despatched. They were accompanied, however, by an express command from the Princess —whose abhorrence for that base, unnatural son, turbulent subject, and faithless friend, was unconcealed—that he should immediately retire to his own domains, and never present himself before her.

More important matters occupied the council also. New tidings had been received from the frontiers; and all those tidings were evil. No doubt could now exist, that while his principal officers were invading the Duchy of Burgundy in the east, Louis XI., with an overwhelming force, was marching onward towards Flanders, taking possession of all those fair lands which had descended to the unhappy princess at the death of her father, and meeting with little opposition on his way. Already Abbeville had thrown open its gates. Ham, Bohain, St. Quentin, Roye, and Montdidier, had followed; and Peronne—proud, impregnable Peronne—had been yielded at the first summons.

Again the Lord of Imbercourt boldly and strongly urged the absolute necessity of propitiating the King of France, and arresting his farther progress, by the immediate union, or at least affi-

ancing, of the Princess of Burgundy and the heir of the French crown. It was the only means, he said—it was the only hope of preserving any part of the dominions, which, by various events, had been united under the coronet of Burgundy; and was it not better, he asked, for the Princess to carry them as a dowry to her husband, than to come portionless to the same prince at last, and receive the honour of his alliance as a matter of grace and favour?

"My lords," replied Albert Maurice, rising as soon as the other had sat down, "already a thousand times have you heard my arguments against the base and ungenerous step proposed, often have I shown, by reasoning, that the interests of France and Burgundy are as distinct as it is possible to conceive, and that centuries must elapse before they can be united. But, if such be the case with the duchy of Burgundy itself, and all its immediate dependencies, how much more so is it the case with Flanders and Brabant. With England, the eternal enemy of France, has ever been our great commercial intercourse; to our friendship with England do we owe our commercial existence; and the moment that this land is united to the enemy of that great country, that moment our wealth, our prosperity, our being as a distinct land, is at an end. All this I have shown, taking a mere political view: but remembering that I spoke to knights and nobles, to men who can feel for national honour, and fear national disgrace, I have also pointed out the shame—the burning shame—it would be in the eyes of all Christendom, the moment that your bold and gallant prince is dead, to truckle to his often worsted enemy; to yield to Louis the lands which Charles the Bold so stoutly maintained against him; and to give his daughter's hand to the son of that base foe, whose dark and traitorous intrigues effected, more than ought on earth, your sovereign's overthrow and death. Already have I demanded why, instead of all those degrading concessions, you do not prepare defences in the field; and why, rather than talk of yielding tamely to an unjust tyrant, you do not go forth to encounter him with lance and sword, as in the days of the great duke? But now I must use another language—language more bold and more decided—and say that Flanders, Hainault, and Brabant, will never consent to be the slaves of France,—France, who has so often wronged us, and whose efforts, vain as they have been, have never ceased to grasp at the dominion of these lands.

More! I say—and by my voice the three united states now speak to the councils of Burgundy—that we will consider and pursue, as a false and perfidious traitor, bought with the gold of France to betray his lady's interest, that man, whoever he may be, who henceforth proposes the subjection of these lands to a French prince."

The Duke of Cleves eagerly supported the bold speech of the young citizen, as did also the Bishop of Liege—more perhaps from personal hatred to Imbercourt, than from any real disapprobation of the French alliance. Warm and violent words passed on all parts; and the discussion had reached a pitch of dangerous turbulence, when it was announced that the Count de Meulan, envoy extraordinary from the King of France, had just entered the city, and taken up his abode at the principal inn of the place.

This news gave a different turn to the deliberations of the council; and after determining that the reception of the ambassador should take place the following day, the assembly broke up; and its various members separated, with those feelings of personal animosity burning in their bosoms, which have so often proved fatal to great designs.

CHAPTER XXV.

About seven o'clock at night, a post arrived in Ghent, bearing the unwelcome intelligence that Hesden, Montreuil, Boulogne, Cambray, and many other places, had yielded to the arms of France; that Philippe de Crèvecœur, the oldest and most tried servant of the house of Burgundy, had gone over to the enemy; and that Arras itself was lost to Flanders. Such were the tidings that reached Albert Maurice, while busily debating with Ganay, in a private chamber of the Hotel de Ville, the means of raising, as rapidly as possible, a large force for the defence of the country.

The messenger delivered the sealed packets into the hands of the young President, with notice that they were of the utmost importance; but, ere he opened them, Albert Maurice dismissed

the bearer calmly, and finished the phrase which his entrance had interrupted. He then broke the seals, and read; but as he proceeded, notwithstanding his great command over his own feelings, it was clear, from the contraction of his brow, and the quivering of his lip, that the tale therein written was anything but pleasing.

Casting them on the table, after a moment's deep thought, the young citizen laid his hand sternly upon the papers, and approaching the lamp towards them, pointed to the fatal tidings from Arras, saying to his keen companion,—"This is sad! this is terrible! We must, if possible, keep this from the knowledge of the council, till this pitiful ambassador has had his reply."

Ganay read the contents of the papers over, word by word; then raising his eyes to the face of his companion, and compressing his thin, bloodless lips, he replied, calmly but sternly—"Imbercourt must die!"

Albert Maurice started.—"No, no! not so," replied he; "I am not one of those tigers, Ganay, to cross whose path is death. He may oppose me in the council; he may even thwart me in my plans; and yet not die, Ganay. But if he betray my country, his deed be upon his head. I will crush him with my heel, as I would a viper."

"Imbercourt must die!" reiterated Ganay, in the same stern, determined tone he had used before.—"He *will* betray *your* country and *mine*,—and he dies. I have marked him well, I see his plans. He, like the traitors who have gone over before, will sell his country to France for French gold; and he must die. The only difference between him and this Philippe de Crèvecœur, is, that the one, less cunning than the other, went over with nothing but his own brute courage to sell; while this Imbercourt, take my word for it, will carry, as merchandise to Louis of France, the hand of Mary of Burgundy, and the coronet of all these states."

"Never!" cried Albert Maurice, stung to the heart, as the other had intended, and striking his clenched hand upon the table; "never! My head or his shall whiten in the wind over the battlements of Ghent, before such a sacrifice be consummated."

The moment he had spoken, however, he felt that he had given Ganay an advantage; and well understanding that the game between him and his subtle comrade was one that admitted

of no oversight, and that he must be as much upon his guard with his apparent friend as with a declared enemy, he hastened to turn the conversation from a topic on which he could not speak wisely. "We must think farther"—he said; "we must think farther! In the meantime," he added, abruptly, "see you to this messenger, and ensure that he do not spread his news abroad before the reception of the worthy ambassador, whom Louis has deigned to send. I have that in yon cabinet which shall overthrow, at a word, all that his cunning can advance, were he as cunning as the fiend whose name he takes. At the same time, Ganay, I must trust to your zeal also, my friend, for the skilful management of our other purpose. This Duke of Gueldres you must render popular with the citizens, and oppose him strongly to the Duke of Cleves. Not too far, however. I would equally divide between them the power that the Duke of Cleves at present holds entire. Better it were, nevertheless, that the people over-favoured him of Gueldres, than the other; for he has no hope. Every noble in the land would rise up against him; and, at the worst, it were but three passes of this steel"—and he touched the hilt of his sword—"to send him howling to the place he has so long deserved; and to win me the thanks of all the world, for ridding it of such a monster."

Notwithstanding all his care, Albert Maurice felt—and felt angrily—that the eager passions of his heart would burst forth and display more of his real feelings and emotions than he was willing to expose. Ganay smiled, too, as he listened; and with his smiles there was always mingled a degree of mockery of the person who excited them, which rendered their meaning very doubtful.

"May I trust you?" demanded Albert Maurice, sternly.

"You may," answered the druggist. "Doubt me not; for with you, Albert Maurice, I am more frank a thousand-fold than with any other human being. We are like two men playing one game of chess, against a whole host of adversaries; and it is necessary that we should see each other's moves. Your game I know, Albert; and mine I do not seek to conceal from you; for it would be both useless and fatiguing. I will, then, do your bidding in regard to these two men of Cleves and Gueldres; and so play them off against each other, that they shall both combine, in their dissensions, to raise you to the height of your ambition."

He spoke boldly; and Albert Maurice felt that, for once at least, he spoke truly. He saw, indeed, that although they were in some sort partners in the game, as Ganay had depicted them, yet they were playing for different stakes, and might soon find that they had different interests.

"And when this game is won, Ganay," said he, calmly, after a brief pause—"this game in which you and I stand as partners,—say, are we to turn round the board, and singly play one short game more, against each other?—Ha! is it not so?"

"No; on my life!" replied Ganay, with a degree of fervour unusual with him.—"No; on my life, young man. I have my passions, like my neighbours; but I am without ambition. Do *you*, too, believe me without a touch of feeling? You have shown me kindness in times past: you once saved the life of one that is now no more; three years ago you held my head when it throbbed with fever, when we were together on the shores of the Adriatic: and if you cross not my purpose—if you oppose not the stronger passion, which guides, and struggles with, and masters all—you shall find that my gratitude is only second to my revenge. "Even more!" he added, resuming his ordinary air of calm shrewdness: "I can be even grateful for those things which I accomplish by your means—though without your will; and our common efforts for one great purpose bind us together more firmly than you think. So, now, farewell!—but remember, I tell you Imbercourt is a traitor—and he must die!"

"If he be a traitor, die most certainly he shall," replied Albert Maurice; "but in regard to that man, I mistrust my own motives too much to rely on my own judgment. More, Ganay!—still more!—I mistrust your motives, too; and I will not rely on your judgment either. Nay, protest not! I see your bitter persevering hatred of that man as clearly as if your bosom were of glass, though I see not the occasion of it. But it matters not what be the occasion.—I doubt myself, and I doubt you; and others, more impartial than either you or I, shall judge him, though, God knows, I know no cause of enmity you can have towards him.—So now, farewell."

Ganay's lip curled with a very mingled expression, as Albert Maurice pronounced the last words, but he made no reply; and, leaving the young citizen, he proceeded to confer with the messenger who had lately arrived, and then held a long and secret conference with Maillotin du Bac.

The post that brought such unwelcome tidings from the frontier supped well at the Maison de Ville, and, resting his weary limbs upon his bed, soon found the sweet sleep of fatigue; nor did he ever stir from the precincts of the building. No one saw him without its gates; no one held conference with him within, except in the presence of Ganay himself. Nevertheless, before an hour had passed, the whole news he had brought were known to Imbercourt, and were by him carried straight to the Princess. How it reached him it were hard to say, for no post came to the Cours du Prince from that quarter, but still he had learned it all. Not a word had escaped him,—the whole evil tidings were known, and the consternation was excited which Albert Maurice had been so desirous of warding off, till the ambassador from France had been received and dismissed. The views of the young citizen in this desire were certainly partly patriotic and partly personal; but his immediate object was to send back the messenger of the deceitful Louis with such a reply, as would render the project of an union between France and Burgundy hopeless. Every fresh success of the French king of course strengthened the arguments of those who advocated the marriage of Mary with the Dauphin; and this torrent of evil tidings was well calculated to overpower all opposition.

Such had been the light in which Albert Maurice had seen the effect likely to be produced by the progress of Louis; but in vain, however, did he take measures to conceal it. Each event, rather magnified than otherwise, reached the ears of Imbercourt, and by him were that very night detailed to Mary herself. Tidings had arrived in Ghent, not long before, that almost the whole of the duchy of Burgundy also had been overrun by French troops; and this, together with the unresisted advance of the King of France on the side of Flanders, the total loss of Picardy, Artois, and the Boulonnois, the desertion of her friends, the turbulence of her subjects, and the power of her enemies, overcame at length the unhappy girl's hopes and her firmness. After a long conference with Imbercourt and her chancellor, as well as with her cousin, the Lord of Ravestein, and her best of friends, Margaret, her father's widow, in an evil hour Mary consented to send the two former on a mission to the base monarch who was usurping her inheritance.

Under their dictation, with a trembling hand, she wrote part of a letter to Louis XI.; but where she came to give them power

to treat of her alliance with France, her feelings overpowered her, and the tears gushing from her eyes, obscured her sight.

"Give me the pen, my sweet child," said Margaret of York. "My Lord of Ravestein and myself, your two nearest relatives and friends, will each write a part under your direction: so shall the document acquire additional weight, as showing the wishes of so many persons."

This was accordingly done, and Mary calmly heard a paper read, which she felt was binding her to misery for life. With a hurried hand she signed her name, but she could bear no more, and hastened from the chamber.

"Poor child!" said Margaret of York. "Poor child.—But now, my Lord of Imbercourt, lose not a moment. No communication with this coming ambassador will answer our purpose. You must see Louis himself; and treat with himself, and put forth all your wisdom to meet all his cunning. Hasten to Peronne; fear not to bloody your spurs on the road, for not a minute that flies, till you are before the King of France, may not serve to recall this most necessary paper."

While this determination was adopted by the counsellors, Mary was followed from the room by Alice of Imbercourt; and the moment she had reached her chamber, that princess cast herself upon the bosom of her fair attendant, and wept most bitterly. "Fear not, madam," whispered Alice, "fear not! You shall yet wed him you love."

Mary had never acknowledged her lingering hopes even to Alice of Imbercourt, perhaps hardly to her own heart. But now the more vehement passion overcame the milder feeling, and timidity was forgotten in grief. "Never, Alice! never!" sobbed Mary; "I have just signed away my last and only chance!"

"Fear not!" again repeated the young lady. "Do you remember, madam, when you would not read the scheme of your future fate in the castle of Hannut?"

"Well, very well!" replied Mary, raising her head and drying her eyes; "what then, my Alice?"

"Do you remember, then, that I stayed behind," continued her companion, "when you quitted my uncle's observatory? Well; I remained long enough to give you consolation even now; for I saw there written, that the coronet of an archduchess was to bind the brow of my fair mistress."

Mary drew a deep and doubtful sigh; but there was a bright

blush rose also in her cheek, which might seem an augury of hope; and it were false to say that she did not derive some comfort even from the predictions of a science, which—since the excitement of her visit to the castle of Hannut had worn away—she could hardly be said to believe.

At that period, however, each day of the life of Mary of Burgundy was a day of renewed care and anxiety; and the proceedings of the next morning opened with the tedious and painful ceremony of receiving the ambassador from the French monarch.

At the hour appointed it was announced that the Count de Meulan waited, and Mary took her seat in state, with the Bishop of Liege on one hand and the Duke of Cleves on the other, while Albert Maurice and various members of the council stood round. It had struck the young citizen, however, as soon as he entered the hall of audience, that neither Imbercourt nor Hugonet, the two chief supporters of what was called the French party, were present; and it appeared to him not a little extraordinary that they should be absent, if in the town, when such an opportunity for showing their respect to the King of France occurred, as the public reception of his envoy. During the time that elapsed between his own arrival and the introduction of the ambassador, he asked frequently, but in vain, for the absent counsellors, and on every movement near the door looked for their appearance, supposing that the business of the day could not or would not proceed without their presence. He was not a little surprised, however, when the order for admitting the Count de Meulan was at length given in their absence.

The doors were soon thrown open; and, dressed in the excess of splendour, but with a certain crouching and stealthy pace, habitual to the barber of the most cunning king in Europe, Olivier le Dain entered the hall, and approached the chair of the Princess. After the ceremony of his introduction, which he went through, not without grace, but without dignity, the ambassador was commanded to deliver his letters, which he accordingly did. These were found to be in full and correct form, and he was then directed to state the purport of his embassy, and what he was charged to communicate to the Princess of Burgundy, from her cousin the King of France.

Here, however, the envoy hesitated; and, after a moment's thought, replied in a low, soft voice, that he was directed by

his master, Louis the most Christian king, to explain his views and wishes to his beloved cousin and god-daughter, the Princess Mary, in private, and to her alone. He therefore, he said, craved a private audience, in which his communication should be more full and complete.

The Bishop of Liege,—whose territories lay too close to the French frontier, and whose interests were too nearly connected with those of France to suffer him to feel any great personal interest in the distinct rights of the House of Burgundy,—had hitherto been the person who spoke on the part of the Princess. He of course had evinced every sort of respect for the ambassador of the French King; but at this point the Duke of Cleves broke in; and with a haughty and contemptuous tone, informed the Count de Meulan, that what he demanded was not consistent with the customs of the court of Burgundy. He, must, therefore, he said, declare openly his errand to the Princess surrounded by her council, for no other course of proceeding could be permitted.

Again the ambassador hesitated: uttering several sentences, from which—though loaded with fine and sounding words, and gilded with a show of argument—all that could be gathered was, that the open communication required by the council was contrary to his monarch's commands. He then seemed about to retire; but at that moment Albert Maurice advanced a little before the rest, and craved leave to explain the object and views of the ambassador, which that functionary seemed to have so much difficulty in doing for himself. The assembled court, and the ambassador likewise, gazed on him with some surprise; but the young citizen proceeded.

"In the first place," he said, "your Grace will be glad to hear, who is the noble envoy whom that mighty monarch, Louis, King of France, thinks fit to send to the court of Burgundy—to the daughter of that great prince who overthrew him in the field by valour and skill, and who foiled him in the cabinet by decision and boldness. Allow me, in the man who calls himself Count de Meulan, to introduce to your notice Olivier le Dain, or by some called Le Méchant, barber to the most Christian king, born at Thielt, and serving as a barber's boy at Saarvelt, near this city."

A roar of laughter burst from the nobles of Burgundy; and Albert Maurice proceeded, waving his hand to the doorkeepers

to prevent the barber from making his exit too rapidly.—"Do not let the worthy ambassador depart till he has heard me explain the object of his coming. I hold here in my hand, by the favour of some unknown friend who sent these papers to me, a copy of the private instructions of the King of France to the *Barber Ambassador*, which direct him, strictly, to keep the Princess and the court of Burgundy engaged in long and tedious negotiations, while he strives in private to persuade the people of Ghent to invite the King of France to enter their territory. He is further ordered to spare no means, neither money nor promises, to make the good men of this city declare for the King of France, and throw off the authority of their lawful sovereign. To this, by your Grace's permission, I, as the only individual of the Burgher class in this presence, will take upon me to reply, that Louis, King of France, mistakes entirely the character and disposition of the men of Ghent; for, though they may be anxious to preserve their own liberties and privileges, they are no less anxious to preserve the legitimate authority of their sovereign; and, though they are never disposed to submit to tyranny from their own princes, they are no less determined to resist all foreign domination. Let him learn that he can neither buy us with his gold, nor fool us with his promises; and that his intrigues and offers will be equally in vain with the men of Ghent. It is for you, my lords," he continued, turning to the members of the council present, "as older men, and more experienced in the ways of courts than myself,—it is for you to judge what course ought to be pursued towards a man who comes as ambassador to a sovereign prince; and, at the same time, undertakes to seduce the subjects of that prince from their allegiance—who approaches the presence of an oppressed princess, from the man who is robbing her of her territories and massacreing her subjects, affecting in words and in style to negotiate with her as the messenger of a friend and a relation, while his real errand is to excite treason amongst her people, and to bribe her citizens to revolt.—It is for you, my lords, I say, to judge what is to be done with the caitiff who undertakes such a commission for such a man!"

"Nail his ears to the door-post!" cried the Lord of Vere, an impetuous noble of North Zealand."

"Throw him into the river!" cried the Duke of Cleves; "such treatment does he well deserve."

Various other pleasant modes of disposing of the person of the

barber ambassador were suggested by different members of the council, probably without any intention of carrying them into effect. They were not, however, without producing some impression, and that of no very agreeable nature, upon the mind of Olivier le Dain himself. That worthy personage had listened to the speech of Albert Maurice in downcast silence. No flush betrayed his agitation or shame, though his lip quivered a little, and at one time he took two or three steps towards the door. But when he heard the many unceremonious methods of treatment proposed, he gradually crept back till he was within a step of the entrance of the chamber. His face was still turned towards the council; and he still seemed listening attentively to the somewhat bitter strictures which were passing upon his own conduct; but he showed no inclination to retreat farther than was absolutely necessary to keep himself out of the reach of violent hands, so that the doorkeepers were off their guard. As the Duke of Cleves spoke, the barber paused and listened, gave a furtive glance over his shoulder; and then, without any effort towards taking leave, he darted out of the presence at once, reached the court-yard, mounted his horse, and galloped away to the inn where he had lodged.

Before he arrived at that building, however, he began to feel that his apprehensions of personal violence had probably been a little too hasty; and a loud laugh, which he remembered to have heard, as he quitted the audience-hall, confirmed him in that opinion. The calm reflection of a few hours, during which he seemed totally forgotten by the whole town, refreshed his courage and re-animated his hopes; and, therefore, not to abandon his purpose without another effort, he ventured to ride out in the evening; but the moment that he presented himself in the streets, he was greeted with so much mockery and laughter, that he soon found the attempt would be vain. A full account of his birth and situation had been industriously circulated amongst the people during the day; and as nothing excites the hatred and contempt of the populace more than to see a person sprung from amongst themselves, affecting the airs and splendour of a class above them, they were all prepared to shower upon his head every sort of ridicule and abuse. No sooner did he appear, than this determination to insult and annoy him in every different way, began to manifest itself among the people. One held a pewter basin before his horse's head; another lifted up his rugged chin, and

begged that his highness would shave him, just to keep his hand in; and a third exclaimed, that he must not think to lead the people of Ghent by the nose, though he might often have taken the King of France by that organ.

Just while he was turning away from these unpleasant salutations, in order to return as fast as possible to his hotel, some shouts met his ear, which seemed rapidly coming nearer, and in a moment after he perceived half a dozen horsemen cantering easily down the street, with a number of men and boys running by the sides of the horses, shouting loudly, "Long live the Duke of Gueldres! long live the noble Duke of Gueldres!" The horseman at their head was a powerful handsome man, of about fifty, with a coarse and bold expression of countenance, but still possessing that easy air of dignity and command, which is a part of the education of princes. Some one, as the cavalcade approached, recognising the person of the French ambassador by his splendid dress and gaudy train, shouted out the name and various opposite occupations of Master Olivier le Dain; and the Duke of Gueldres, dashing on, drove his horse rudely against that of the unfortunate barber, which reared with the stroke, and almost plunged him into the canal, near which they were riding.

"Ha, ha! Master Barber," shouted the Duke, in the rough and brutal tone which he usually employed, when he had no purpose to answer which might require softer speech; "thou canst never shave without water, man, but there is plenty in the canal."

The populace roared their applause; and while Olivier le Dain, keeping his seat with difficulty, made the best of his way back to his inn, and thence for ever out of the gates of Ghent, the Duke of Gueldres rode on, nor stopped till he sprang from his horse at the house of Albert Maurice.

Representatives from all the different cities of that part of Belgium which was then under the dominion of Burgundy, had arrived in Ghent the day before; and at the moment when the Duke of Gueldres approached, the young President was in the act of despatching a deputation to Louis XI., then encamped at Arras. Albert Maurice, be it remarked, went not himself; but at the head of the deputation, on the part of Ghent, was the druggist Ganay.

The Duke of Gueldres found the street before the young

citizen's house crowded with horses and horse boys; and the different chambers of the house itself filled with the attendants of the deputies and the officers of the city—messengers, visiters, soldier, and spectators—displayed a spectacle more like the palace of a sovereign prince than the house of a simple merchant in a Flemish town.

"By my faith," the Duke muttered, as he walked on amidst robes, and embroidery, and gold chains, and furred gowns, "times have strangely changed with the good city of Ghent, since that cursed tyrant shut me up in his old stone rat-trap. Which is Master Albert Maurice?" he then demanded of a merchant who was passing out; "which is the grand bailli—which is the president of the municipal council?"

"Yonder he stands at the head of the table," replied the merchant, "speaking with the deputies of Utrecht and Bruges."

At that moment the eye of the young citizen fell upon the Duke of Gueldres; and—though he was unannounced, and Albert Maurice had never beheld him before—either from having heard his personal appearance described, or from having seen some picture of him, the burgher at once recognised the prince, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

The Duke of Gueldres was surprised to behold so young a man chosen from amongst the jealous and factious citizens of Ghent, to wield the chief authority of the city, to fill two of the most important offices, and to influence so strongly the councils of all Flanders; but he was still more surprised to find that high and dignified tone in the merchant, which so well became his station. He had been prepared to see the president in possession of vast power, but he now perceived that his power was greatly derived from his superiority to his class, and he at once saw the necessity of suiting his demeanour—for the time at least—to the man. With a degree of suavity which no one knew better how to assume, when it answered his purpose, than Adolphus Duke of Gueldres, that base and brutal prince, now, with his manner softened down to an appearance of mere generous frankness, thanked the young citizen for his liberation, and told him that he had good reason to know that the happy event was solely owing to his intervention.

Albert Maurice at once gracefully complimented the Duke on his enlargement, and disclaimed all title to gratitude for an act which, he said, emanated from the Princess herself. He had,

he acknowledged, strongly advised her to the course she had pursued, when she had condescended to consult him upon the subject; but he assured the Duke that she had first spoken of her kinsman's liberation, before he had ventured to propose such a proceeding.

"Well, well," replied the Duke, "I knew not that my fair cousin was so generous, but I will kiss her pretty cheek in token of my thanks, which, perhaps, she will think no unpleasant way of showing one's gratitude."

The blood rushed up to the temples of the young citizen; but he made no reply, and merely bowed low. He then begged the Duke to excuse him for a few moments, while he concluded the business in which he had been engaged. The Prince replied, that he would detain him no longer; and Albert Maurice, with cold and formal courtesy, suffered him to depart—from that moment either a secret or an avowed enemy. As soon as he was gone, the young citizen took leave of the deputies, besought them to make all speed to meet the king, and directed them to beg him—instead of hastening on to plunge the two nations into long and sanguinary wars—to halt his armies, till such time as the states general could devise and propose to his majesty some fair means of general pacification.

He then gave into the hands of Ganay a letter, fully authorizing the deputation to treat, in the name of the Princess,—which instrument had been unwillingly wrung from Mary during the morning, notwithstanding the secret powers which she had so lately given to Imbercourt and Hugonet. To this Albert Maurice added a private injunction, to trace and discover all the movements of the two ministers, whose absence from the council of that day he had remarked; and there was a sort of fierce and flashing eagerness in the eye of the young citizen, as he spoke this in a low whisper, which the druggist marked with pleasure and expectation.*

The results of this deputation to the crafty monarch of France are so well known, that they need but short recapitulation. Louis received the members of the Belgian states with all civility,

* The proceedings of the municipal council of Ghent, even before the assembling of the States, which it entirely commanded, were, in many instances, much more bold and tyrannical than any that it has seemed necessary to particularize here. Some authors assert that it forbade Mary to transact any public business without its sanction.

and treated them individually with distinction; as that wily monarch well knew, that through the intervention of such men alone he could hope to win that extensive territory, which he was striving to add to France. At the same time, he positively refused to treat with them in their official capacity, and affected, at first, a great degree of mystery in regard to his reasons for so doing, assigning a thousand vague and unsatisfactory motives, which he well knew would not be believed for a moment, but which he was aware would induce the deputies—encouraged by his homely and good-humoured manner—to press so strongly for a further explanation, as to afford him some excuse for the base treachery he meditated against their sovereign.

The deputies fell into the trap he laid; made use of every argument to induce him to negotiate with them upon the powers they had received from their several cities; and finally urged, that if he would not acknowledge them as the representatives of the towns of Flanders, Hainault, and Brabant, he must at least consent to receive them as ambassadors from the young Duchess of Burgundy, whose letters of authority they then tendered.

Still, however, Louis refused; and, at length, as if worn out by importunity, he said, "My good friends of Ghent and the other towns of Flanders, you must very well know, from my whole conduct towards you, that I would rather treat with you than with any other persons. I am a plain man, and love to deal with plain citizens; but you are entirely mistaken in supposing that you possess the confidence of my dear god-child Mary, Duchess of Burgundy, or that you are really authorized to treat for her. It is not impossible," he added, with a self-satisfied and yet mysterious air, "it is not at all impossible, that, were I so disposed, I might show you a letter, written partly in her own hand, partly in that of the Duchess Dowager, and partly in that of the good Lord of Ravestein, directing me to place confidence in no persons but my excellent, good friends, and faithful servants, the Lord of Imbercourt, and William de Hugonet, Chancellor of Burgundy, who were both with me at Peronne for many hours some nights ago, and are by this time back again in Ghent."

The deputies, confounded and surprised, expressed, in the first heat of their astonishment, a very uncourtly doubt of the truth of the King's statement; and Louis, affecting to consider his honour impugned, committed one of the basest acts of the many

that stain his memory, and produced the private letter of the Princess Mary to the eyes of her turbulent and headstrong subjects. Furious with indignation and disappointment, the deputies retired from the presence of the King, without having concluded anything, and journeyed on with all speed towards Ghent, neglecting the great and vital business of the moment, in order to plunge into fresh scenes of anarchy and confusion.

Louis saw them depart with scorn and triumph; and, as proud of his successful villany as ever conqueror was of a final victory, he marched on to new successes in every direction, satisfied that, in the discontented spirit of the people of Ghent, he had a faithful ally that not even self-interest could sever from him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It is wonderful, though common to a proverb, that days of sunshiny brightness and placid tranquillity should so often precede great convulsions in the natural and the political world; and that although "coming events often throw their shadows before them," yet that the storm, when it does approach, should almost always find the world all smiling, and the birds in song.

The day after the return of the deputation from Arras, the aspect of the city of Ghent was more like that which it had been during the most brilliant days of Philippe the Good and Charles the Bold, than it had appeared for many months. The shops and booths, which projected into the street, and which, being totally unprovided with any means of defence against popular violence, were generally closed in times of tumult and disturbance, were now again all open, and full of the finest wares. Mountebanks of different grades, and those who sold books, and repeated verses, were exercising their usual vocations at the corners of the streets. Burghers and their wives, lords and ladies, artisans and peasantry, all in their gayest dresses,—for it was one of the high festivals of the year,—moved about in the streets; and, to crown all, the foul weather had disappeared, and the sun shone out with a warm and promising beam.

A great multitude had collected near the palace gates, to see

the different members of the council, and the deputies from the various cities and states of Flanders and Brabant, proceed in state to visit the Princess Mary; and the approbation of the crowd—often depending not a little upon the splendour of the several trains—was loudly expressed as their peculiar favourites approached the gates of the great court. At the same time it was remarkable, that though loud and vociferous in their applause, the multitude restrained all marks of disapprobation on the appearance of persons supposed to be unpopular, with wonderful and unexpected moderation.

Since the first effervescence of feeling had subsided, after the defeat of Nancy and the death of Charles the Bold, and since the apprehension of immediate revolt had gone by, the ministers of Mary of Burgundy,—or, to speak more correctly, the members of the provincial council of Flanders,—though spending the greater part of the day in the palace, had generally returned to inhabit their own hotels at night. Thus, almost every one but the Lord of Ravestein, who remained in the palace with his cousin, had to traverse the crowd in their way to the audience hall. Imbercourt and Hugonet, neither of whom had ever been very popular, passed amidst profound silence, and Maillotin du Bac, who, in his official dress as prévôt, was riding about the ground, took no small credit to himself for saving those two noblemen from some sort of insult. The Duke of Cleves again, was loudly cheered; but the Duke of Gueldres, who, by some means unknown even to himself, had acquired an extraordinary degree of popularity during the short time which had elapsed since his return to the city, received a degree of applause that went far beyond that which greeted the Duke of Cleves. Albert Maurice, however, as the great favourite of the people, and one whom they considered more peculiarly as their own representative, was received with loud, long-continued, and reiterated shouts. Indeed, as he rode on upon a splendid and fiery horse, dressed in magnificent apparel—not only as president of the council of Ghent and grand bailli of the city, but as holding, in the capacity of chief pensionary, the presidency of the States General of Flanders*—and followed by a number of guards and attendants, with his lordly air and his beautiful person, he looked more like

* When the States of Flanders assembled in Ghent, which was generally the case, either the chief pensionary or the chief eschevin of that city presided in the assembly as a matter of right.

some mighty prince going to claim his bride, than a simple merchant about to appear before his sovereign.

The visit was one of ceremony, and as no business of importance was to be transacted, the Princess received her court in state; and, to see the splendour with which she was surrounded, the guards, the attendants, the kneeling subjects, no one would have supposed, as was indeed the case, that Mary of Burgundy was less a free agent than the meanest subject in her capital.

All who presented themselves before the Princess were received with affability and courtesy, with the one exception of the Duke of Gueldres, from whom, as he approached the chair of state, she seemed to shrink with a repulsive abhorrence, which she could in no degree command. Although he appeared there contrary to her commands, she strove to say something kind in regard to his liberation, and to smile as he offered his thanks; but the words died away before they were uttered, and the smile faded upon her lip as soon as it appeared. To Imbercourt and Hugonet, the Lord of Vere and others, who supported the French alliance,—although they had so strongly pressed her to sacrifice all her own personal feelings, and to abandon the hope of happiness for life,—she still, from a deep conviction of the honesty of their intentions, and from long habits of regard, yielded the same marks of friendship and affection with which she had always distinguished the counsellors and friends of her father, however much their advice to him or to herself had been at times opposed to her own opinion, or to her dearest wishes. On Albert Maurice, too, as the boldest and strongest supporter of her own wishes against the voice of her more politic advisers, and as the leader of those who really ruled in Flanders, she smiled sweetly, from a feeling of gratitude as well as esteem; and none who beheld the young citizen in the midst of that splendid court, could help acknowledging that he was well fitted, in appearance at least, to take his place among the noblest and most courtly of the land. His mien had all the calm dignity of power and the easy grace of confident but not presuming self-possession. There was also a freshness and variety in his words and actions, which, springing from a rich and generous mind, gave a sparkling grace to the whole of his demeanour, and rendered it at once striking and pleasing. There was certainly a difference in his manners from that of the stiff and stately nobles of the court of Burgundy, but it was slight, and to his

advantage, characterized by no want of grace or dignity, but rather by the calm ease of natural politeness, as opposed to the acquired formality of courtly etiquette. It seemed, not that he was assuming a rank, and mingling amidst a class to which he did not belong—but rather as if he had suddenly taken possession of a station which was his own by the indefeasible title of ennobling nature. The respect and deference also with which all the rest of the court felt themselves obliged to treat him, both from his authority over the people, and the powers of his own mind, placed him at his ease; and perhaps the very excitement which he felt under the eyes of Mary of Burgundy, and the mighty aspirations and brilliant hopes which thrilled in his bosom, were not without their share in giving firmness and dignity to the step with which he trod the ducal halls of the house of Burgundy.

Thus passed by the morning; and everything proceeded in undisturbed harmony and tranquillity, both within the *Cours du Prince* and without its walls. The populace showed themselves calm and placable; and it had seldom happened of late that so many nobles and statesmen, of different opinions and different interests, had met within the gates of that palace with so little jarring and contention. Nevertheless, there were things observed by many of the keen eyes which always hang about courts and watch the flickering signs of the times, that boded events not quite so pacific and gentle as the first aspect of affairs might augur. Between Albert Maurice and the Lord of Imbercourt no words passed; but, when their glances encountered upon more than one occasion, the lordly brow of the young citizen became overcast, and a fire blazed up in his eye, which spoke no very cordial feeling towards that nobleman. Imbercourt himself, whose demeanour through life had always been characterized by calm gravity, not absolutely approaching sadness, but still far removed from cheerfulness, had—since the death of his master—shown himself more gloomy and reserved than he had ever before appeared; and, on the present occasion, there was a deep immovable sternness in his countenance, which had something in it more profound than can be expressed by the word melancholy. He met the fiery glance of the young citizen, however, calm and unchanged. His eyelid never fell, his brow contracted not a line, his lip remained unmoved. Not a trace of emotion of any kind passed over his face, as he endured rather than returned the gaze of the young citizen; and, after remain-

ing a few minutes in the Princess's presence, he took his leave, mounted his horse, and rode homewards. But as he passed by Maillotin du Bac, and addressed some common observation to that officer, there was a sort of triumphant sneer on the hard countenance of the Prévôt, and an unnatural degree of courtesy in his manner, from which, those who saw it, inferred no very favourable anticipations in his mind regarding the Lord of Imbercourt.

When the whole ceremony was over, and Mary of Burgundy was left alone with Alice of Imbercourt, and a few of her other attendants, her heart seemed lightened of a load, and a smile brightened her countenance for the first time since her father's death.

"Thank God, Alice," she said, "that it is over. I was very anxious about the passing by of this morning, for I feared much that some angry clashing might have taken place, concerning the messengers despatched to the cruel King of France.—But you are sad, Alice," she continued,—seeing the fair face of her gay friend overcast with unusual clouds, which probably had arisen from the increased gloom she had observed upon the countenance of her father:—"you are sad, Alice,—you, whose gay and happy spirit seems formed by heaven to bear up against everything."

"I know not well how it is, your Grace," replied Alice, with a sigh; "nothing particular has happened to make me so; and yet, I own, my heart feels more gloomy than it generally does on such a sunshiny day."

"Nay, Alice," replied the Princess, "you must be sad, indeed, to call Mary of Burgundy 'your Grace,' when from our earliest years we have grown up together as sisters more than friends. But be not gloomy, dear Alice; all will, I trust, go well. There is not that evil, in all this sorrowful world, which could shake my trust in an over-ruling Providence, or make me doubt that the end will yet be good."

"But sorrows must sometimes happen," replied Alice; "and in that book,—which I wish I had never looked into,—in the cabinet at Hannut, I saw that some time soon you were to lose two faithful friends:—I wonder if I shall be one."

"Heaven forbid, dear Alice!" replied the Princess. "However, I am sorry that you have told me;" and she fell into a deep and somewhat painful reverie, from which she only roused her-

self, to propose that they should go to the apartments of the Dowager Duchess, Margaret, who inhabited the other wing of the building.

Alice willingly followed; and Margaret—though, in her grief and widowhood, she had taken no part in the ceremonies of the day—received her fair visiters with gladness, and inquired with some anxiety how the morning and its events had passed away. Her mind was of that firm and equable, though gentle tone, which feels every misfortune intensely, but bears it with unshaken resolution; and it is a quality of such minds to communicate a part of their own tranquil and enduring power to others with whom they are brought in contact. Thus Mary of Burgundy always felt more calm and more resigned after conversing long with Margaret of York than before; and if, in the present instance, her design in visiting her stepmother was to obtain some such support, she was not disappointed. Both herself and Alice of Imbercourt returned from the apartments of the Duchess less gloomy than when they went; and the vague omens which had given rise to their melancholy were dropped and forgotten, especially as nothing occurred during the rest of the morning to recall them to the mind of either the Princess or her fair attendant. The day went by in peace and tranquillity. The multitudes dispersed and retired to their own homes. The brief sunshine of a winter's day soon lapsed into the dark, cold night; and a thick white fog, rolling densely up from the many rivers and canals that intersect the town of Ghent, rendered all the streets doubly obscure. Several of the hours of darkness also went by in tranquillity: though the glare of many torches, lighting various groups of persons, through the dim and vapoury atmosphere, and casting round them a red and misty halo of circumscribed light, together with the shouting voices of people who had lost their way, and the equally loud replies of those who strove to set them right, broke occasionally upon the still quiet of the streets of Ghent, during the course of the evening.

All this, too, passed away, and the hour approached for resigning the body and the mind to that mysterious state of unconscious apathy, which seems given to show that we can die, as far as sentient being goes, and yet live again, after a brief pause of mental extinction. Mary of Burgundy, whose days—if ever the days of mortal being did so—should have passed in peace, was about to retire to rest, thanking Heaven that one more scene in

life's long tragedy was over. Her fair hair was cast over her shoulders, in soft and silky waves, and she was thinking—with the natural comment of sorrow upon human life—"how sweet a thing is repose!" Although she had assumed in public the state of a sovereign princess, in private she had hitherto dispensed with that burdensome etiquette, which renders the domestic hours of princes little less tedious than their public ceremonies. Her ladies were all dismissed to rest before she herself retired to her own apartment, and two tiring women of inferior rank were all that remained to aid her in the toilet of the night. Those women, whose whole intellects were limited in their range to the thoughts of dress and ornament, contented themselves with performing their several offices about the person of the Princess, and leaving her mind to reflection. Thus, perhaps, the hour which she spent each night in her own chamber, ere she lay down to rest, was one of the sweetest portions of time to Mary of Burgundy. It was the hour in which her heart, relieved from all the pressure of the day, could commune with itself at ease; and, could one have looked into her bosom on that or any other night, the whole course of her life gives reason to believe, that it would have displayed as fine and pure a tissue of sweet and noble ideas, as ever the thoughts of woman wove. Her toilet for the night, however, had proceeded but a short way, on the present occasion, when the door of the chamber was thrown open with unceremonious haste, and Alice of Imbercourt, pale, agitated, trembling, with her own brown hair streaming over her shoulders like that of the Princess, showing how sudden had been the news that so affected her, rushed into the apartment, and, casting herself upon her knees before Mary, hid her eyes upon the lap of the Princess, and wept so bitterly as to deprive herself of utterance.

"What is the matter, my dear Alice? What is the matter, my sweet girl?" demanded Mary, anxiously. "Speak, speak, dear Alice! what has happened so to affect you?"

"Oh, madam, madam!" sobbed Alice, "my father—my dear father!"

"What of him?" exclaimed Mary, turning deadly pale. "What has happened to him, Alice? tell me, I beseech you!"

"Oh, madam, they have arrested him and the Lord of Hugonet!" replied Alice, "and have dragged them from their beds, loaded with chains, to the town-prison!"

"Good God!" cried Mary, clasping her hands; "will they deprive me of all my friends? Has not the gold of Louis tempted all feeble hearts from my service, and will my own subjects take from me the only ones who have been found firm?"

"They will kill them,—be sure they will kill them!" exclaimed Alice. "There is only one person on the earth can save them; and, alas! I fear these butchers of Ghent will be too quick in their murder for him to come."

"Who do you mean, dear girl?" asked Mary. "Who is there you think can aid them? What do you propose? Let us lose no time; but take any way to save their lives. Some one," she added, turning to her tiring women, "go to my mother the Duchess; tell her I would fain speak with her.—Now, Alice, what way do you propose?"

"Oh, let me go!" cried Alice, wildly, "let me go! Let me lose not a moment of time! I will easily find him out,—or send on messengers—or bring him by some way!—Let me go, I beg —I entreat!"

"But of whom do you speak?" again demanded Mary. "You forget, dear Alice, I know not what you mean."

"I mean!" replied Alice, while a slight blush passed rapidly over her countenance, and was immediately again succeeded by the eager and terrified paleness which had before appeared there,—"I mean—I mean the Vert Gallant of Hannut. 'Tis scarce three days ago, that, by a letter from Hannut, Hugh de Mortmar bade me seek aid and assistance from him, if anything happened, in the tumults of this city, to cause me danger or distress. He said that the Vert Gallant owed him much. Let me go, madam, I beseech you."

"But you cannot go alone, dear Alice," said the Princess, gazing upon her almost as much bewildered as she was herself; "you cannot go alone, and at this hour of the night. At all events, you must have a party of the guards."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Alice; "they will only let one person go through the gates at a time: and there are men here set to watch the river, so that no large boat can pass."

At this moment the Dowager Duchess of Burgundy entered the chamber of her stepdaughter; and Mary was beginning to explain the circumstances, as far as she had been able to gather them from her terrified companion, when she found that Margaret was already acquainted with many more particulars con-

cerning the arrest of Imbercourt and Hugonet than herself. So daring an act on the part of the turbulent men of Ghent, as the arrest of two members of the supreme council of Flanders, of course terrified and shocked both Mary and her stepmother. But their personal apprehensions for the future, and consideration of the long series of calamities and horrors which such a deed portended, were overpowered by the wild agony of the daughter of one of those victims of popular sedition. The tears poured over her cheeks, her fair hands clasped in convulsive agony, till the taper fingers seemed as if they would have broken; and still she besought the Princess, with wild eagerness, to permit her instant departure in search of him on whose assistance she seemed to place her only hope of delivering her father.

Mary called upon her stepmother to second her arguments, for the purpose of persuading Alice to secure some protection and assistance, at least in her attempt to escape from the town, and in the difficult search she proposed to undertake for one, whose character was so doubtful, and whose dwelling was so uncertain. But Margaret, animated by a bolder spirit, saw the proposal in a different light, and supported strongly the desire of Alice, to seek the assistance she hoped for, accompanied alone by the page.

"Great things," she said, "have been done by less men than this adventurer seems to be. Many a battle between York and Lancaster has been won by the aid of foresters and outlaws. If you can once secure his assistance, and he can, by any of those strange means which he has been often known to employ so successfully, introduce his bands within the town, these rebellious men of Ghent may yet be taught a lesson which they have much need to learn. Go, then, my poor girl, if you have any probable means of discovering the abode of him you seek. Take the page with you; furnish yourself with all the money and jewels which you can collect. The Princess and I will do our best to contribute; for with such men gold is better than eloquence; and, at all events, you will have the satisfaction of doing your duty towards your father."

"In the meantime, Alice," added Mary, "be not more anxious than necessary for your father's safety. These men will, doubtless, never attempt anything against his life without bringing him to trial. All the preparations must take long, and I will

leave no means unused to delay their proceedings, and to mitigate their rancour. I will send for the President; I will speak with him myself. I will entreat, I will beseech, I will rather lay down my own life than that they should hurt my faithful servants."

"Thank you! thank you, dear lady!" replied Alice, kissing her hand; "thank you, thank you for your comfort!—But I must go," she added, with eager anxiety; "I must not lose a moment."

"Stay, stay!" said the young Duchess, seeing her about to depart. "Let Bertha call the page whom we employed before, and we will determine on some better plans than your own unassisted fancy can frame."

It would be unnecessary here to enter into the minute details of all that ensued; and, indeed, so rapidly were the arrangements concluded, that many words would only serve to give a false impression of things that were resolved and executed in a few brief moments. Suffice it, then, that the page was soon brought to the presence of the Princess; and, in eager and hasty consultation, it was determined that he should proceed in search of a small skiff, which, being brought opposite to the palace wall, on the water side, would enable Alice to make her escape with less chance of observation than if she attempted to pass the gates either on horseback or on foot, at that hour of the night.

No large boat would be allowed to proceed, and therefore he was directed to seek the smallest that he could possibly find; but, at the same time, to use all his shrewdness in endeavouring to discover some boatman, who was either trustworthy by native honesty, or might be rendered secret by a bribe. The boy at once declared in reply, that he well knew a man who used to bring the duke's venison up from the woods, and whose taciturnity was so great, that those who knew him averred, he had never said ten words to anybody yet in life, nor ever would say ten words more.

In search of this very desirable person the page instantly proceeded; but, either from the darkness of the night, or from having found it difficult to wake the boatman out of his first sleep, the boy was so long in returning, that all Alice's preparations for her journey were completed, and many minutes spent in agonizing anxiety, ere he re-appeared. When he did come,

however, he brought the glad tidings that all was ready; and, after taking leave of the Princess, Alice of Imbercourt, with a rapid but silent step, threaded the dark and intricate passages of the palace, passed the postern unquestioned, and finding her way with difficulty through the dim and foggy air, to the steps which led towards the water, stood at length by the side of the boat. Stepping forward over some unsteady planks, she was speedily seated in the stern, with the boy beside her: the single boatman, whom they had found waiting, pushed silently away from the bank; and, in a minute after, the skiff was making its slow way through the fog, down the dull current of the Scheldt.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Although other matters of some moment might claim attention in this place, we will not interrupt the course of our narrative, but will follow, throughout her journey, the fair fugitive from the city of Ghent; as far, at least, as that journey was permitted to proceed unimpeded.

The boat glided along over the calm dull bosom of the Scheldt, with hardly any noise, except the occasional dip of the oar in the water, and the slight creaking of the gunnel as the rower plied his stroke. Every one knows that the river which, a little distance further down its stream, assumes so much importance as to be the object of intrigue, negotiation, and even war, to rival nations, presents no very imposing aspect in the neighbourhood of Ghent; but so gloomy was the moonless sky, and so dense was the heavy fog which hung over the waters, that from the moment the boat had pushed off from the quay both banks became quite invisible. The deep, misty obscurity of the atmosphere, and the profound darkness of the night, might have been a cause of terror to Alice of Imbercourt under any other circumstances; but now all apprehension of danger from the want of light and the difficulties of the navigation, was swallowed up in the fear of being overtaken or impeded in her escape; and the impenetrable veil which seemed to cover all things around her she looked upon as a blessing, in the hope that it would also

conceal herself. The darkness, however, which gave this feeling of security, did not continue so completely uninterrupted as to leave her entirely without alarm. Now and then, as the boat shot past some of the warehouses, or the quays where the larger craft were moored, an indistinct dim line of light would break across the mist from lamp or lantern, hung up to show the late watcher the objects of his toil or of his anxiety; and the heart of poor Alice would beat quick with fear, lest the skiff, or those it contained, should attract the eye of any of the eager and wary citizens. But all these perils were soon past; the boatman rowed strongly and well: the slow current with which they were proceeding was not powerful enough to afford much assistance to his exertions, but still the boat skimmed swiftly over the waters, and ere long the last bridge was passed. Beyond it there extended along the banks a short suburb, terminated by scattered houses belonging to cowfeeders and gardeners, and forming a sort of brief connecting link between the wide open country and the fortified city; and further on, again, came the rich fields and meadows in the immediate vicinity of the town, blending gradually into the thick woods that at that time commenced about Heusden and Melle.

Alice's heart beat more freely, as the fresher air, the slight clearing away of the mist, the occasional lowing of the cattle, and that indescribable feeling of expanse which is only known in the country, showed her—though she could not yet see the objects on the banks—that she had passed beyond the limits of the city of Ghent. The page, too, felt the same relief, and, for the first time, ventured a whispered observation on the good fortune that had attended their movements. But Alice was still too fearful of being pursued or discovered, to utter anything but a low-toned injunction to be silent; and no further sound marked their course but the stroke of the oars, as the sturdy boatman impelled them on, unwearied, over the waters of the Scheldt.

At the distance of about three miles from the city the air became gradually less dense, and at the end of half a mile more the fog had cleared away entirely. It was still dark, but the stars afforded sufficient light to show the fair fugitive, and her companion, that they were passing through a country where the meadow and the cornfield were merging in the forest. Scattered patches of copse and underwood, mingled with fields which had

been reclaimed to the use of man, came sweeping down to the banks of the river; and straight before the travellers lay a dark and shadowy track, broken into dense, heavy masses, the rounded forms of which, cutting black upon the lighter sky beyond, distinguished it as wood, from the soft sweeping lines of the uplands which in other directions marked the horizon.

There is scarcely anything on earth more gloomy and impressive than the aspect of a deep wood by night, with just sufficient light in the sky to contrast strongly with the stern body of impenetrable shade presented by the forest, and yet not enough to show any of the smaller parts into which it appears separated by day. The wood lay straight before the bow of the boat, seeming to swallow up the widening course of the Scheldt, as flowing on, it reflected, here and there, the faint lines of light which it caught from the sky, and which served to mark its track, till it was lost in the sombre shadows of the trees. An indefinite feeling of dread passed through the bosom of Alice of Imbercourt as the boat cut its way on towards the dark and gloomy wilderness which the forest seemed to present at that hour of the night. She believed, indeed, that she had no cause for fear; and her own peculiar plans absolutely required that she should banish all timidity of the kind that she now felt. Some inquiry, however, was necessary, in order to guide her further movements; and, as her apprehensions of pursuit had by this time vanished, she addressed a few words to the boatman, to lead him into conversation regarding the part of the country at which they had now arrived.

"Those seem very dark and extensive woods," she said; "do we pass through them?"

"Yes, noble lady," replied the man, and struck on with more vigour than before, as if he considered the time occupied by the three words he spoke as lost to all profitable employment.

"Are they safe to travel at night?" demanded the young lady again.

"No, noble lady," was all the reply she received.

"But do you mean that it is dangerous to pass through them in a boat?" inquired Alice.

"I cannot tell, madam," answered the man; but still he rowed on, and the page—laughing with the thoughtless glee of youth—whispered that the attempt was vain to make silent Martin give

them any information, as he had never been known to speak ten words to an end in his life. By this time they were within the limits of the forest, and nothing surrounded them on every side but the trees dipping down their branches over the water. Alice, however, ventured one more question, to which the answer she received, though as short, was more satisfactory than those the boatman had formerly given.

"How far does the wood extend?" she demanded.

"Three quarters of a league, noble lady," replied the boatman, and again plied his oar in silence.

Whether Alice's voice, and his reply, had called attention, or whether the stroke of the oars itself could be heard at the banks, cannot be determined; but the man had answered but a moment, when a slight plash was heard from behind a little projection of the shore, on which an old oak had planted itself, spreading its roots down to the very river. Then came a rushing sound, as of something impelled quickly through the water, succeeded by the regular sweep of oars, and, in a moment after, a boat, rowed by two strong men, darted out into the mid-stream, and followed rapidly after that in which Alice sat. Still silent Martin, as the boy called him, pulled stoutly on without a word; but the superior power of the two men who pursued, soon brought them alongside the boat, and, grappling her tight, they addressed the boatman, in a tone rough but not uncivil.

"So ho, friend!" they cried; "stop a bit. What news from Ghent? How goes the good city?"

"Well, well, my masters," replied the boatman, still striving to impel his skiff forward, though the proximity of the other boat rendered the effort to use his oars unavailing.

"It is silent Martin," said one of the men, "and a fair dame, by the Lord!—Who have you here, Master Martin?"

"There, there!" replied the boatman, with what appeared to be an immense effort to make an oration; "let me get on. You do not stop women, my masters. Surely you would never stop a lady like that?" And exhausted with this long speech, he again tried to push away from the other boat, but in vain.

"No, no," cried one of the men, "we will not stop the lady long; but every one who rows upon the Scheldt, now-a-days, must have a pass from the captain. So come along, Master Martin; and when you and the young lady have given all the

news of Ghent, that, doubtless, you can give,—for certainly young ladies do not come up the Scheldt at this hour of the night for nothing,—we will let you go on your way."

"Fine times!" said silent Martin: but as resistance was in vain, he suffered them to pilot his boat to the mouth of the little creek from which their own had shot out; and he himself, with a certain degree of awkward gentleness, aided Alice of Imbercourt to land.

Her feelings were of a very mixed nature; but, assuredly, not such as might be imagined from a consideration of the more obvious circumstances of her situation. She was certainly terrified as well as agitated, and she trembled a good deal; but, at the same time, she showed no unwillingness to obey the commands of those who now had her in their power. Her terror, however, did not escape the eyes of the men who had rowed the other boat; and one of them addressed her in a kindly tone, saying, "Fear not, fear not. No lady ever suffered harm or dishonour from the green riders of Hannut. So do not be alarmed, and you shall soon be free to go whithersoever you will."

These words, which he spoke as they were landing, seemed to re-assure the fair traveller, more than they would, probably, have done most other people at such a moment.

"Oh, where is he?" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Lead me to him, I beseech you. It is he whom I am now seeking."

"Ay, indeed!" said the adventurer. "Mean you the Vert Gallant of Hannut, lady? He is soon found by those who seek him, and rather often found by those who seek him not.—Ho, Roger!" he continued, addressing his companion in the boat, "rouse up Frank Van Halle, and Simpkin yonder, to keep watch with thee, while I lead the lady and the boy to the rendezvous. Come now, my pretty mistress," he added, "take care of your steps, for it is as dark as the tomb.—Here, take an old man's arm. It was more pliant in days of yore, but never stronger, and will serve at least to help you up the bank."

Alice was glad of assistance, and laid her hand on his arm; but though his occupation had been sufficiently evident before, yet she almost started back when her fingers rested upon plates of cold iron, forming the brassards or defensive armour for the arms,—so much are our minds the slaves of our corporeal sensations, that our convictions are never vivid till we have verified them by our external senses. She recovered herself immediately,

however, and clung to him both for support and direction; for the whole scene around was wrapped in profound obscurity; and though her eye was already accustomed to the night, yet the additional gloom of the forest was so great, that she followed the adventurer in perfect blindness, without being able to see, one moment, where she was to set her foot the next.

After climbing a slight acclivity, which compelled them to walk slowly, they came to more open ground, where her guide hurried his pace, and Alice was obliged to follow rapidly upon his steps, though not without often shrinking back for fear of striking against the trees, which her imagination pictured as protruding across the path. The way, though in fact short, seemed to her long, from the darkness and uncertainty in which she moved: but at length a light began to glisten between the branches; and, after walking on a few minutes longer, she perceived a glare so strong as almost to make her believe that a part of the wood was on fire. As her conductor led her forward, she every now and then caught a glimpse, through the breaks in the wood, of figures moving about across the light towards which they were approaching; but a moment after, the whole scene was again shut out by a tract of withered beech trees, loaded with their thick dry leaves, through which the path that Alice and her guide were pursuing took a sudden turn. The blaze of the fire, however, was sufficiently general to light them easily on their way; and in a few minutes more they emerged at once into the little sheltered arena whence it was diffused.

The frost, as I have before said, had for some time broken up, and the preceding day had been warm and fine. Nevertheless, sufficient precautions had been taken by the tenants of the forest to dispel, in their own neighbourhood at least, whatever touch remained of winter. In the midst of the open space which Alice now entered, they had piled up,—with very unceremonious appropriation of the duke's trees,—a fire of immense logs, sufficient to roast a hecatomb; and many a relic of the more ancient and simple methods of dressing meat displayed themselves around, in various immense pieces of venison and beef roasting on wooden spits in the open air, while a gigantic black caldron, pendent from the immemorial triple chevron, which has suspended all primeval pots from the days of Noah, fumed and bubbled with most savoury promise. Around, in groups, lay a number of stout soldiery, prepared to refresh their vigorous and sinewy limbs

with the contents of the pot, or the burden of the spit, as soon as those skilled in the mystery of cooking pronounced that they were ready for the knife. Several more, whose appetite seemed still fiercer, stood round the fire, watching with anticipating expectation the progress of the cookery. But it is to be remarked, at the same time, that amongst all this number of persons—amounting fully to fifty or sixty—a great deal of decent order was kept up, and nothing like either rioting or confusion was observed, notwithstanding the more than doubtful character of the persons concerned. There was no singing, no shouting; and those who were conversing together spoke in an under tone, as if afraid of disturbing some person engaged in more important business in their near neighbourhood.

The cause of this orderly tranquillity, perhaps, might be discovered by running the eye on a little way beyond the fire, where stood a sort of rude, but extensive, wooden shed or hut, raised upon a number of upright piles driven into the ground, and thatched on the top with boughs, leaves, and rushes, which materials also served to cover three sides of the building. The side that remained open was turned towards the fire; and, consequently, it both commanded a view of everything that took place in that direction, and exposed to the sight of the other parties in the savanna all that was passing in the interior of the hut. It was owing to this disposition, that, as Alice approached, she at once perceived the Vert Gallant of Hannut, habited, as we have before described him, reclining on the ground under the shed, with a paper before him, on which was apparently traced a rude map of some country, the topography of which he seemed studying intently. Sitting beside him, supplied with a flat board, which served the purposes of a table, and on which were seen the implements for writing, was the sleek, round monk, of whom we have previously given some account under the name of Father Barnabas, and who now, with a ready pen, appeared busily tracing some despatch at the dictation of the adventurous leader.

On the other side of the Vert Gallant stood a page, whose rich dress of green and gold seemed but ill to correspond with the scene in which he was found, holding a torch high in his hand, to throw light upon the papers before his two companions; and near him again was a person in the habit of a courier of some distinction, whose horse, all in flakes of foam with hard riding, stood, held by another page, close by the entrance of the shed.

The approach of Alice and her conductor instantly drew the eyes of a great part of the persons assembled in the savanna upon her; and, shrinking from the gaze of the rude men amongst whom she now found herself, the lady drew her mantle closer round her, and bent her look upon the ground, while, at the desire of him who had led her thither, she paused with the page, and suffered their guide to advance alone. Without taking any notice of the groups around, he walked forward at once to the shed; and only staying till the Vert Gallant had concluded the sentence which hung upon his lips, he addressed a few words to him, which were inaudible where Alice stood. Their effect upon the leader, however, was great and instantaneous. He started at once upon his feet, and turned fully towards the spot where the young lady stood; but the bars of the casque, which he seemed never to lay aside, still prevented his own countenance from being seen.

After the glance of a single instant, he advanced towards Alice; and, bending respectfully over her hand which he took in his, he bade her welcome with kind and graceful courtesy.

"I know the general meaning of your coming, lady," he said, "though not the immediate cause; and I will speak with you as soon as I have despatched the messenger. In the meantime trust to this old man, my lieutenant, who will lead you to a place where I can hear your commands in private."

Alice listened attentively, and looked up when he had done, with a glance, in which anxiety and apprehension for her father's fate were strangely mingled—considering the moment and the scene—with a rise of the eyebrow, and a turn of the fair mouth, which altogether approached very near one of the merry smiles that had so thronged her lips in happier days. She replied not, however, though at first she appeared about to do so; but following her former conductor in silence, was led once more into the paths of the wood. She was not now called upon to walk far; for little more than a hundred steps brought her in front of a low-roofed building, which, apparently had been in former times the abode of one of the forest guards, but which had now fallen into the occupation of the free companions.

Everything within bore an air of comfort and neatness hardly to have been expected from its present tenants; and in the chamber to which Alice was conducted, nothing appeared to announce that it was not still the abode of quiet and affluent industry.

The moment she and the page had entered, the old man retired and closed the door; and Alice remained gazing upon the embers of the wood fire that lay sparkling on the hearth, till the sound of rapid steps passing the window again made her heart beat with redoubled quickness. In a moment after the door was thrown open, and the tall, graceful figure of the Vert Gallant once more stood before her.

"Quit the room, page," he said, as he entered, "but do not leave the chamber-door."

The boy hesitated; but a sign from Alice made him instantly obey; and the Vert Gallant advancing, took her hand and led her to a seat.

"You are tired, lady, and evidently agitated," he said; "and I fear much that some event of a sad and serious nature has gained me the honour of your presence in this wild place."

Alice looked up with the same sparkling smile which had before played for a moment on her countenance. "You cannot deceive me!" she said. "Hugh de Mortmar, do you think that I do not know you?"

The Vert Gallant paused an instant as if in suspense, then threw his arms round the fair girl who stood beside him, and pressed her gently to him. "Dear Alice," he said, "how did you discover me?"

"It were vain to say how, Hugh," replied Alice: "I may have had suspicions long before; but, from the day of the thunderstorm in the forest of Hannut, I have not had a doubt; though why Hugh de Mortmar should need to league with outlaws and adventurers, and, as it would appear, to hide his face even from such strange companions, is more difficult to divine."

"I am, indeed, willing, though not obliged, to hide my face even from the bulk of my gallant followers," replied the young cavalier, undoing the clasps of his casque. "Ay! and in order to guard against surprise or inadvertency, to wear so foul a seeming as this, even beneath that heavy helmet;" and removing the iron cap, he showed her a half mask representing the countenance of a negro, which covered his own face to the beard.

"You start, Alice!" he continued, "and look somewhat aghast! Is it at that fearful painted piece of emptiness?"

"No!" she answered, "no! But it is to think that you—you, De Mortmar—should, for any cause, condescend to hide yourself beneath such a semblance."

"Indeed, Alice!" said De Mortmar, with a smile. "Then tell me, beloved, and put it fairly to your own heart, what is it that a man will not do—what that he should not do—to recover those things that have been snatched from his race by the unjust hand of power, and to free a father from captivity?"

"Nothing, indeed!" replied Alice, to whose bosom one part, at least, of the question went directly home. "Nothing, indeed! and I will believe, with the faith of a martyr, that no other way than this existed for you to accomplish such an object; although till this moment I knew not that you had either parent in existence."

"But your father did," replied the young cavalier; "and when first I called these troops together, Alice,—for you must not confound them with a band of lawless plunderers,—when first I called them together, it seemed the only way by which I could ever hope to liberate my imprisoned father. I am Hugh of Gueldres; and it has been only the hope, and the promise of your hand, joined to the prospect held out by your noble father of obtaining my own parent's liberation by peaceful means, which has so long prevented me from asserting his right in arms, though the whole force of Burgundy were prepared to check me—I might say, indeed, to crush me," he added; "for though —with the forces of Hannut, and all the discontented men which the late duke arrayed against him in his own dominions, with the aid of France, and, perhaps, of Austria, my right and my good cause might have done much, while Charles remained embroiled in foreign wars—I could have hoped for little had he once turned his whole force against me. But, as I have said, your father persuaded me to delay. During the years that I have thus been induced to pause, I have been obliged to hide as best I might the force of free companions I had raised; and no method of concealment could be more efficacious than that which I have adopted. As the Green Riders of Hannut we passed nearly unmolested, while the Duke of Burgundy pursued his ambitious schemes against Lorraine, and his mad ones against the Swiss; and though, if you recall the past events, you will find that the green riders have punished the guilty and the bloodthirsty, have laid many a plundering noble under contribution, and have levelled more than one stronghold of cruelty and oppression with the ground, yet not one act of baseness or barbarity can be traced to themselves."

"Then why such necessity for concealing yourself from them?" demanded Alice, carried away for a moment from other thoughts by the personal interest she felt in her lover's conduct.

"What!" exclaimed the young cavalier, "would you have had me, dear Alice, give so important a secret as that of my existence,—when the Duke of Burgundy and all his court, nay, my own father also, thought me dead—would you have had me give such a secret as that to the keeping of more than five hundred men? No! they were levied secretly by one who has been devoted and faithful to me through life,—Good Matthew Gournay, who led you hither. The long accumulated wealth of my more than father, the Lord of Hannut, served to gather them together. His forests and the catacombs under the castle gave them shelter: and, though far too strong in numbers to fear the weak bands of the Prévot, or the force of any of the neighbouring nobles, it was absolutely necessary to conceal, with the most scrupulous care, from the court of Burgundy, that so large a body of independent troops existed, and still more that such a force was commanded by one who had cause for deadly hatred towards the duke, now dead. Thus, by the advice and with the aid of the good Lord of Hannut, I mingled with the world as his nephew, under which title he had brought me up from my youth. But as it was necessary to keep my free companions in continual employment, and to acquire over them that personal authority, which nothing but the habit of commanding them could obtain, I was often obliged to assume the character of the Vert Gallant of Hannut, and lead them to enterprises, which, however dangerous, I took care should never be dishonourable. The very concealment of my person—which was revealed only to those who had previously known me—added a sort of mysterious influence to the power which general success gave me over them; and I believe that, at this moment, there is no enterprise, however wild or rash, to which they would not follow me, with the most perfect confidence."

"But my father," said Alice, reverting to the still more interesting topic of her parent's danger; "I must speak with you of my father."

"Well, then, in regard to your father," replied the young noble; and proceeding eagerly in his exculpation, he explained to Alice that Imbercourt had always lamented the Duke of Bur-

gundy's severity to his parent, and had striven by every means to call the sovereign to a sense of justice, even before he acquired a personal interest in the house of Gueldres. The real name and rank of the supposed Hugh de Mortmar, the cavalier proceeded, had been revealed to her father, when Alice's hand had first been promised to him as the young heir of Hannut; and seeing at once that Hugh's design of liberating the imprisoned Duke of Gueldres, and recovering his duchy by force, was anything but hopeless, Imbercourt had only become the more anxious to obviate the necessity for such an attempt, by inducing Charles the Bold to grant as a concession that which he might otherwise be forced to yield on compulsion. The purposes of the Duke of Burgundy, however, were not easily changed, nor was his mind to be wrought upon in a day; and Imbercourt was still occupied with the difficult task he had undertaken, when the defeat of Nancy took place. On the other hand, he had ever laboured zealously to induce the young heir of Gueldres to delay; and many of those trifling circumstances which impede the execution of the best laid schemes, had combined, from time to time, to second his endeavours with Hugh of Gueldres. Friends and confederates had proved remiss or incapable,—supplies had been retarded,—changes had taken place in the disposition or circumstances of particular states; and three times the young noble had been half persuaded, half compelled, to put off the attempt on which he had determined. All this Hugh of Gueldres poured forth eagerly to Alice of Imbercourt, too anxious to exculpate himself from all blame in the eyes of her he loved, to read in her looks the more serious cares that were busy at her heart.

"In the disturbed and dangerous state of the country,' added the young cavalier, "although my father has been liberated by other means, it is my determination to keep my band together, and, watching every turn, to choose that moment which must come, when a small force, acting vigorously for one great purpose, may give the preponderance to right, and crush the wrong for ever."

"Now, then, is the moment! Hugh de Mortmar," cried Alice, clasping her hands eagerly; "now, then, is the moment!—if you feel any gratitude towards my father,—if you feel any love for me,—if you would uphold the right,—if you would crush the

wrong,—if you would save the innocent from ignominious death, —lose not a day, but force the rebel people of Ghent to free my unhappy father!"

The young cavalier, who had never suspected the actual danger of the Lord of Imbercourt, started with surprise; and Alice, with the eager eloquence of apprehension, made him rapidly acquainted with the events which had occurred in Ghent during the morning, and which had thus brought her to seek him.

"Ha!" cried the Vert Gallant, "does Albert Maurice—does the President of the States sanction such proceedings? I had heard that when the unhappy eschevins were murdered by the populace, he wrought signal vengeance on the perpetrators of the crime; and, if ever I saw one to whom I should attribute noble feelings and just and upright sentiments, he is the man."

"He is ambitious, Hugh," replied Alice, vehemently; "wildly, madly ambitious. I have marked him well throughout—and you may trust a woman's eyes for such discoveries—he has dared to raise his thoughts to Mary of Burgundy. He loves her,—deeply and truly, I believe;—but he loves her not with the love which an inferior may feel for a superior whom they may never hope to gain, but rather with that rash and daring love, which will make ambition but a stepping-stone to accomplish its bold purpose—which will see the land plunged deeper and deeper in bloodshed, in the wild hope, that out of the ruins of ancient institutions, and the wreck of order, prosperity, and peace, he may build up for himself a seat as high, or higher, than the ducal chair of Burgundy. It is evident, Hugh, —it is evident, that he has the power as well as the daring to do much; and one of his first steps will be upon my father's head; for had that father's will and counsel been followed, our fair and gentle Princess would now have been the bride of the Dauphin of France, and every hour that he lives will be an hour of suspense and anxiety to that ambitious burgher."

A slight smile of contempt, springing from the prejudices of the day, curled the lip of Hugh of Gueldres, as Alice first spoke of the love of the young citizen for the Princess of Burgundy; but it vanished speedily as she went on; and he shook his head with an air of thoughtful sternness as he replied, "He is one to be feared and to be opposed, far more than to be contemned.—Alice, my beloved," he added, taking both her hands in his, "I must think what may be best done to save your

father; and of this be assured, that I will lose not one moment in the attempt; but will peril life and fortune, and every future hope, to deliver him instantly."

"And yet," said Alice, while a deep blush spread over her whole face, "for my sake be not over rash of your own person. Save my father, I beseech, I entreat!—but, oh! remember that you, too,—that you——"

Her feelings overpowered her, and she finished the sentence by tears. Hugh of Gueldres drew her gently to him, and consoled her as far as the circumstances permitted. But on such occasions there is little to be said but commonplaces; and all he could assure her was, that while he made every effort to save her father, her love would make him as careful of himself as the nature of the task would allow.

In that day, however, every sport, pastime, and occupation of man's life were of so rude and dangerous a nature, that perils lost half their fearfulness from familiarity; and, though Alice of Imbercourt could not but feel pained and apprehensive for her lover, yet her feelings of terror were much sooner tranquillized than those of a person in the present day could have been under similar circumstances.

In the meanwhile, the emergency of the case required that Hugh of Gueldres should instantly fix upon some plan for the deliverance of the Lord of Imbercourt, and proceed to put it in execution without loss of time; and it was also necessary that Alice, whose return to Ghent would have been both fruitless and dangerous, should seek some safe asylum till her father's fate was decided. It was accordingly determined that she should instantly proceed to the castle of Hannut; and means for rendering her journey both safe and easy were arranged at once by her lover.

While the litter for conveying her thither was in preparation, and the soldiers destined to escort her were saddling their horses, Hugh of Gueldres stole a few brief minutes from more painful thoughts, for the enjoyment of her society, and the interchange of happy promises and hopes;—nor were those brief moments less sweet to Alice and her lover, because they were so few, nor because they were mingled with many an apprehension, nor because many an anxious topic intruded on the conversation. It is the light and shade, the close opposition of the dark and the sparkling, that gives zest even to joy. Hugh de Mortmar felt all the sweetness of their brief interview to the full for the

time; but, the moment after he had placed Alice in the vehicle, given strict directions to the band which accompanied her, and seen the cavalcade wind away into the dark paths of the wood, he turned to less pleasing thoughts, summoned some of those from his troops in whom he felt the greatest confidence, and remained with them for a short time in close deliberation, concerning the measures to be taken for the deliverance of the Lord of Imbercourt.

A plan was soon determined; and an hour before daylight one of the band was despatched to Ghent, habited as a peasant, and charged to gain every information in regard to the proceedings of the council, but to hasten back with all speed, as soon as he had obtained sufficient knowledge of what was passing in the city. In the meanwhile, all was held in readiness to act, immediately upon the receipt of the tidings which he was to bring; and messengers were despatched in every direction, to prepare the bodies of free companions, scattered through the different woods in the neighbourhood of Ghent, for instant movement upon the city.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

While such events had been passing without the gates of Ghent, the Estates of Flanders and Brabant—as the members somewhat grandiloquently styled the anomalous assemblage which had been collected in that city—had prolonged their sittings till night had shaken hands with morning. The Lords of Hugonet and Imbercourt had, as we have seen, been arrested by their commands; but this was not all, and every individual of any weight, who was clearly connected with what was called the French party at the court, had likewise been committed to prison. It may be necessary, however, to state how such a bold and sweeping measure—a measure so full of difficulties, and so likely to encounter strenuous opposition—had been carried into effect.

No favour was shown to any one; and, as soon as the assembly met, Albert Maurice, so averse, in general, to deeds of violence, proposed in quick succession, and with an eager light in his eye, which proved how deeply his personal feelings were implicated,

the names of the victims who were to be exposed to the fiery ordeal of a public trial, under such an excited and furious state of the popular mind. With bold and sweeping positions, supported by extraordinary eloquence, he laid it down, in his opening address, as a first grand principle, that those who sought to unite Flanders with France were declared enemies to their native country; and he went on to assume, that even those who could show that no mercenary motive influenced them, were worthy, at least, of banishment, while those who could be proved to have been bought by France, merited nothing less than death. All this was readily admitted by his hearers; but the high rank and station of the first men that he then proceeded to proscribe, their fair reputation, and a long train of brilliant services to the state, caused no light feelings of surprise and apprehension to agitate the various members of the States, as they heard them named. But there was a power and an authority in the tone of the young President, which overawed or carried away the greater part of his hearers; and the calm sneer, or cold philosophic reasoning of Ganay, who supported him, drove or induced many of the rest to yield.

Still it required but the strenuous opposition of some one individual, to rouse and lead a large party in the States against the bold and dangerous measures proposed; and, to the surprise of all, that individual was worthy Martin Fruse. As soon as Ganay had concluded, he rose, and, after some agitated embarrassment,—occasioned both by the importance of the subject on which he was about to speak, and his dislike to oppose his nephew,—found words to begin; but, once having done so, he poured forth, with rapid utterance, one of those torrents of rude eloquence which generosity of heart and rectitude of feeling will sometimes elicit from the roughest and most untutored mind.

"No, no, Albert! No, no, my dear boy!" he exclaimed. "No, no; it is very wrong,—very wrong indeed! For God's sake, my friends and fellow citizens, pause! let us be wise and firm, but moderate and just. We have done great things,—indeed we have. We have recovered our freedom; we have regained those ancient laws and usages which were our blessing in the olden time, and which may bless us still, if we use them discreetly. But, fellow citizens, remember, oh, remember! there is a point where our own privileges end, and where those of other classes and other men begin. Let us not take one stride beyond

the barriers of our own rights; for surely, if we do, we shall, sooner or later, be driven back with disgrace. The man who, with power to right himself, suffers another to rob him of his property, is little better than a fool; but he who, because he has once been robbed, grasps at the possessions of another, is none the less a robber himself. The nobles have their own privileges and their own laws; and right it is that they should have them; for perhaps we are less fitted, from our habits and situation, to judge them, than they are to judge us. But, setting that point aside, we claim our own laws and our own judges, and we have obtained them: the nobles, too, claim theirs, and let them have them too. If they have wronged each other, let them right themselves; and if they have wronged the state, whereby we may suffer too, let us carry up our impeachment of their conduct to the footstool of the Princess, and demand that they be judged by their peers, according to law. But on no account let us either arrest them without lawful authority; and still less let us presume,—a body of men superior to them in numbers, and in some sort, I will say, prejudiced against them, because we hold a lower rank than they do,—and still less, I say, let us presume to judge them, when we cannot, from our very station, judge them impartially. A man can very well judge others, may be, when he despises them; but no men can judge others whom they envy. I know nothing of these two lords; and all I have heard of them makes me believe that they were good and faithful servants of their prince, so long as he was living; but if you have good reason to think that they have since betrayed their country to France, accuse them before the Princess and her council, and let them be judged by their equals."

"What! and give them time to escape the pursuit of justice?" demanded Albert Maurice, sternly; but immediately assuming a softer tone, he added, "Had any other man spoken the words we have just heard, I should have instantly called upon the States of Flanders not to entertain for a moment ideas which would go to circumscribe all their powers. I would have endeavoured to show that we have a right, as the representatives of the whole of Flanders and Brabant, to defend our existence as a nation, and our general interests as a free people, by arresting any one whom we find labouring to sell us at the highest price to a foreign power; and, by making the most terrible example of such traitors, to deter others from similar treason,—without

adducing any weaker reasons. But to you, my uncle,—my best and kindest friend,—I am bound by love and gratitude; and to you also—as the oldest and most revered member of the council—the States are bound by reverence and esteem, to yield every motive which can satisfy your mind. I, therefore, as one of the provincial council of the Princess, may now inform you, that one half of that council——"

"The Duke of Gueldres has signed the order," whispered Ganay, laying a parchment before the President, who instantly proceeded,—"that even a majority of the council, have consented to the arrest of these two nobles, the Lord of Imbercourt and the Chancellor Hugonet; and surely, did there exist no other right in this assembly to try them for their manifold and recent offences, the warrant of three such men of their own order as the Duke of Cleves, the Duke of Gueldres,* and the Bishop of Liege, would be ample authority for such a proceeding."

As he spoke, he spread out the parchment on the table before the States; and, slowly pronouncing the names of the three princes who, from the base motives of personal ambition or revenge, had been induced to consent to such a degradation of their class, he pointed with his finger in succession to their signatures attached to the order for arresting the unfortunate nobles. Martin Fruse was silent; but the voice of every other person present was raised for the instant execution of a warrant so signed, though many, by leaving the order without any further authority, would have gladly shifted the responsibility of the act upon those princes who had justified it, in order to escape themselves from a task, for which, with all the will in the world, they wanted the necessary courage.

Albert Maurice, however, and several others, made of sterner stuff than the generality of the burghers by whom they were surrounded, had more extended views and more daring purposes, and were determined not to trust the execution of the vengeance they proposed to wreak on the two counsellors, to such doubtful friends as the Dukes of Cleves and Gueldres, and the Bishop of

* The Dukes of Cleves and Gueldres were actuated, in the present instance, by very evident motives; the one wishing to obtain the hand of the Princess (which Imbercourt and Hugonet strove to give to France) for his nearest relation, and the other for himself. The motive of the Bishop of Liege is supposed by historians to have been revenge for acts of justice rendered by Imbercourt under the reign of Charles the Bold.

Liege. The first, indeed, had shown himself the bitter foe of Imbercourt from the moment he had discovered that the statesman had determined to save the country from foreign invasion, if possible, by uniting Mary of Burgundy to the heir of the French crown. To the Bishop of Liege, Imbercourt had long been a personal enemy; and the Duke of Gueldres had motives of his own, or rather motives suggested by Ganay, for seeking to alienate the unhappy minister from the councils of the Princess. Each, however, of these great lords, Albert Maurice well knew, were willing to compound for the exile of the minister, and to spare his life; but the young President himself judged rightly, when he thought that Imbercourt, in power or in banishment, would never cease his efforts to execute the design he had formed, till he were dead, or the scheme accomplished; and Albert Maurice resolved that he should die. He tried hard to convince his own heart that his intentions were purely patriotic; but his own heart remained unsatisfied. Yet, having once yielded to the promptings of the worse spirit, the burning doubt in his own bosom, in regard to the purity of his motives, only urged him on the course he had chosen with more blind and furious impetuosity, in order to escape from the torturing self-examination to which conscience prompted him continually. He saw around him difficulties and dangers on every side,—obstacles alike opposed to his ambition, to his love, and to his aspirations after liberty. He believed himself to be in the situation of a mariner on a narrow bank, over which the ocean threatened every instant to break, and overwhelm both himself and the vessel of the state; and he resolved at once to push off into the midst of the stormy waves, in despite of the fears of his companions, believing that his own powers could steer the ship safely, and that their feebleness must yield him the command, till he had piloted her into the port for which he had already determined to sail.

The timidity of some, the subtlety of others, the wilfulness, the self-conceit of all, he saw could only be bent to his purposes by plunging them in an ocean of difficulties, from which he alone could extricate them; and, understanding well the characters of those by whom he was surrounded, and prepared to make their talents, their influence, their wealth, their vices, their very weaknesses, subservient to his one great purpose, he resolved to involve them all in schemes of which he alone knew the extent.

At once, therefore, he rejected the idea that the warrant, signed by the three princes he had named, was sufficient; and though he allowed their names to stand first, he urged upon those who heard him, that the States must also join in the same act, or forfeit thenceforward all pretence to real power. His arguments and his authority easily brought over a large majority of the hearers; and the warrants were sent forth bearing the names of the whole assembly. A number of other persons, less obnoxious, were then, as I have before said, added to the list of those to be secured; and the meeting of the States did not break up till the fearful work of proscription had been dreadfully extended.

The assembly then rose; and member by member, bowing low to the President, who had the day before taken possession of a suite of apartments in the Stadthuys, and now made it his dwelling, left the town-hall, and departed. Ganay alone remained, and he did so on a sign to that effect from Albert Maurice; who, when all the rest were gone, and the doors closed, leaned his folded arms upon the table, and buried his brows upon them, as if utterly exhausted with all the fatigues of the day and the struggle of many a potent passion in the arena of his own bosom. The dull flames of the long-burnt lamps but dimly illumined the wide vacant hall and its dark wainscot; but the great cresset hung just above the head of Albert Maurice; and as the light fell upon the bright curls of dark hair dropping over his arms, and upon the magnificent head and form which those curls adorned, it seemed shining upon some fallen spirit, in the first lassitude of its despair. Nor did the withered form of Ganay, with his shrewd keen eyes fixed upon the young citizen, and his cheek shrunk and pale with the long workings of passions,—concealed by subtlety, but not the less potent on that account,—offer a bad image of some dark tempter, enjoying his triumph over the fall of a better being, then writhing before his eyes under the very fruition of its first evil hopes.

It was Ganay who began the discourse, and the tone of his voice at once roused Albert Maurice from his momentary absence of mind. "They have all plunged in now, indeed!" said the druggist. "I thought not they would run before our will so easily."

"They have plunged in, indeed," replied Albert Maurice, "and so have we! But that matters not. We will lead them

safely through. But now tell me—How was the Duke of Gueldres won to our wishes? He owes his freedom as much to Imbercourt as to any one. Is he then so base a slave as he has been pictured? Is the soil of his heart really so fertile in weeds, that good service produces nothing thence but ingratitude?"

"Nay, nay, my young friend," answered the druggist, while a bitter sneer lurked round his lip, at the very candour he assumed; "you are beginning to think sadly ill of mankind. They are not so bad a race as you believe. Like all great patriots, you affect to despise the very world you would shed your blood to serve. No, no; the Duke of Gueldres, good honest man, would be as grateful as his neighbours, if no more powerful motive came in the way of gratitude. You forget, Albert Maurice, that we are teaching him to believe that his pretensions to the heiress of Burgundy are full as good as those of the sottish heir of Cleves; so that, whoever seeks to give her hand to a stranger, is an enemy to Adolphus of Gueldres, who counts boldly on being her husband."

The cheek of Albert Maurice flushed, and then grew pale; for often in the dull and filthy trade of worldly policy, men must work with tools they are ashamed to touch, and employ means abhorrent to their better nature. Thus, though obliged to balance one mean soul against another, as suitors for her he himself loved, it stung the young aspirant to the very heart to hear their pretensions calmly named by any other human being; and giving way to the first burst of indignation, he exclaimed, "Out on him, vile swine! But beware, Sir Druggist, beware how you raise his mad dreams too high! and still more beware," he continued, as a sudden suspicion seemed to cross his mind, awakened, as had been frequently the case before, by the sneering tone in which the druggist sometimes spoke; "and still more beware how you dare to play into his hands. Mark me, sir," and, grasping Ganay by the arm, he bent his dark brow upon him;—"mark me! I know you well, and you know me, but not so well! You think you use me as a tool, because, to a certain point, you have succeeded while following my steps, and have obtained, and are obtaining, the vengeance for which you thirst. But learn and know that you have succeeded so far, only because the interests of the state and your own desires have been bound up together. It is, that those whom you seek to destroy have given you the means of destroying them, by ren-

dering it necessary that I should strike them; not, as perhaps you dream, that you have bent me to your purpose. You see I know you, and some of your most secret thoughts. But hear me further ere you reply. Learn, too, that the transactions of thirty years ago, are not so deeply buried beneath the dust of time as you may think; and that, though you and Adolphus of Gueldres may meet as strangers now-a-day, I have dreamt that there was a time when ye knew more of each other. So now, you see, I know you, and some of your most secret deeds; and once more, I say, beware!"

It was the second time that Albert Maurice had referred boldly to events in the past, which Ganay had supposed forgotten; and the ashy cheek of the druggist grew, if anything, a shade paler than before, while, for a moment, he gazed upon the face of Albert Maurice with a glance of amazement, most unwonted to his guarded features. It passed off, however, in an instant, and a flash of something like anger succeeded in its room. But that, too, passed away, and he replied calmly, but somewhat bitterly, "I will beware. But you, too, Albert Maurice, beware also. There are some things that it is not well to discuss; but if you can trace—as, for aught I know or care, perhaps you can—my whole course of being for more than thirty years, you well know that I am one whose vengeance is somewhat deadly; and that however strong you may feel yourself, it were better to incur the hatred of a whole host of monarchs, than that of so humble a thing as I am. Curl not your proud lip, Sir President, but listen to me, and let us both act wisely. I love you, and have loved you from your childhood; and, in the great changes that are taking place around us, we have advanced together,—I, indeed, a step behind you; or, in other words, you have gone on in search of high things and mighty destinies, while I have had my objects, no less dear and precious to my heart, though perhaps less pompously named in the world's vocabulary. Let us not, now that we have done so much, and stood so long side by side, turn face to face as foes. Doubtless you fear not me: but let me tell you, Albert Maurice, that I am as fearless as yourself,—nay, something more so,—for there are many mere words cunningly devised, and artfully preached upon, by monks, and priests, and knaves, and tyrants, which you fear, and I do not. But let us set all these things aside; it is wisest and best for us both to labour on together,

without suspicions of each other. If, as you say, you know the secrets of the past, you well know that I have no mighty cause to love Adolphus of Gueldres. In what I have done to win him popularity, and to make him raise his eyes to the hand of the sweet and beautiful Princess of Burgundy, I have but followed your own directions, and no more; and you must feel and know that his power over the people, and his hope of that bright lady, are, when compared with yours, but as a feather weighed against a golden crown."

The firmest heart that ever beat within man's bosom is, after all, but a strange weak thing; and,—though feelings very little short of contempt and hatred were felt by the young citizen for his insidious companion,—though he knew that he was false and subtle, and believed that even truth in his mouth was virtually a lie, from being intended to deceive,—yet, strange to say, the goodly terms that he bestowed upon Mary of Burgundy, and the flattering picture he drew of his hearer's probable success, soothed, pleased, and softened Albert Maurice, and wiped away, for the moment, many of the individual suspicions he had been inclined to entertain before.

It must not be supposed, however, that those suspicions thus partially obliterated, did not soon return. They were like the scratches on an agate, which a wet sponge will apparently wipe away for ever, but which come back the moment that the stone is dry again, and cloud it altogether. He knew Ganay too well, he saw too deeply into the secrets of his subtle heart, to be ever long without doubt of his purposes, though artful words and exciting hopes, administered skilfully to his passions, would efface it for a time. If this weakness,—and it certainly was a great one,—did not influence his conduct, it was, perhaps, as much as could be expected from man.

"I mean not, Ganay," he said, "either to taunt you or to pain you: but as our objects are different, as you admit yourself, I do you no wrong,—even on your own principles,—in supposing that as soon as those objects are no longer to be gained by aiding and supporting me, you will turn to some one whose plans may better coincide with your own. My purpose, then, in showing you how thoroughly I know you, is, that you may have the means of seeing that it would be dangerous to abandon my interest for that of any other person; and that you may balance in your own mind the advantages and difficulties on either side.

But, as you say, to drop this subject, and never to resume it again, unless the day should come when separate interests and different feelings may oppose us hostilely to each other, tell me, candidly and fairly, do you think that, if we encourage the popularity of him of Gueldres, in opposition to this proud Duke of Cleves, we may safely count upon his ultimate failure; for did I believe that there were a possibility of his success, I would slay him myself ere such a profanation should take place:" and as he spoke he fixed his eyes upon the face of the druggist, in order to make the expression of the other's countenance a running commentary upon the words he was about to reply.

"I think," replied the druggist, firmly, and emphatically, "that Adolphus of Gueldres—stigmatized by the pure immaculate world we live in, as the blood-stained, the faithless, the perjured, the violator of all duties and of all rights—has as much chance of obtaining heaven, as of winning Mary of Burgundy. I tell you, Albert Maurice, that she would sooner die,—ay, die a thousand times, were it possible, than wed the man she has been taught to hate from her infancy."

"I believe she would," murmured the young citizen, calling to mind the demeanour of the Princess, when giving the order for the liberation of the Duke of Gueldres; "I believe she would, indeed."

"Besides," continued the druggist, "besides, she loves another. Ay, Albert Maurice, start not, she loves another!—What, man," he continued, seeing his companion change colour, "are you so blind?—I had fancied that all your hopes, and one half your daring, had birth in that proud consciousness."

Never dreaming that his companion would announce so boldly what was still but one of the most indistinct visions of hope, even within his own bosom,—a vision, indeed, which was the prime motive of all his thoughts and actions, but which he had never dared to scrutinize carefully,—Albert Maurice, with all the irritable jealousy of love, had instantly concluded that Ganay, in the first part of what he said, had alluded to some other object of the Princess' affection, and his cheek for a moment turned pale. Otherwise he might have paused to consider whether the somewhat over-enthusiastic tone was not assumed to blind and mislead him; but the latter part of the other's speech set the blood rushing back into his face with renewed force; and his own passions proved traitors, and lulled to sleep the sentinels of the mind.

"Mark my words," continued Ganay; "mark my words, and see whether, by the grey dawn of to-morrow, you are not sent for to the palace. But remember, Albert Maurice, that though patriotism may lead a man to the summit of ambition; and though love, as well as glory and authority, may become the fitting reward for services rendered to his country, yet, in the path thither, he must never sacrifice his duty for any of those temptations, or he will surely lose all and gain nothing."

A slight smile passed over the features of Albert Maurice,—whose passions, in this instance, did not interfere to blind his native acuteness,—when he saw what use his artful companion could make of the words duty and patriotism, while it served his purpose, though, at other times, he might virtually deny the existence of such entities. "How mean you?" he said. "Your position, good friend, is general; but you have some more particular object in it."

"I mean," replied Ganay, "that should Mary of Burgundy use all those sweet words, which love itself teaches woman to employ in moving the heart of man, in order to shake your duty to your country, and make you work out the safety of two convicted traitors, you, Albert Maurice, must have firmness enough to say, no, even to her you love, remembering, that if you let them escape, even into banishment—you may look upon the marriage of Mary of Burgundy with the Dauphin of France as an event not less sure than that you yourself exist. Look, too, a little farther, and think of the consequences. Even supposing you could brook your personal disappointment, and calmly see her you love in the arms of the weak boy of France, what would befall your country? Already one half of the nobles of Burgundy and Flanders have gone over to the French! Already half our towns are in possession of Louis, that most Christian knave; and at the very first breathing of the news, that a treaty of marriage was signed between the heirs of France and Burgundy, the whole land would rush forward to pass beneath the yoke, while the blood of those who sought to save their country, would be poured out in the streets of Ghent, to expiate the crime of patriotism."

"Fear not," replied Albert Maurice; "proved as it is, beyond all doubt, that these two men have dared to negotiate the sale of their native land to him who has been its great enemy, there is no power on earth that could induce me to interpose and save them from the outstretched arm of justice. They shall be fairly

heard, and fairly tried; and if it be shown,—which it cannot be,—that they are guiltless, why let them go, in God's name, as free as the blast of the ocean: but, if they be condemned—they die, Ganay."

"So be it," said the druggist; "in this instance, at least, justice to your country is your only chance of personal success; and now, good night, and every fair dream attend you."

Thus ended their long conference; and, Ganay, descending from the hall, woke his two sleepy attendants, who were nodding over an expiring fire in the vestibule below. Each instantly snatched up his sword and target, to conduct his master home, for the streets of Ghent were not quite so safe, since the death of Charles the Bold, as they had been under his stricter reign. A boy with a lantern preceded the druggist on his way homeward; and as he walked on across the Lys towards the church of St. Michael, the subtle plotter bent his eyes upon the ground, and seemed counting the stones, as the chequering light of the lantern passed over them. But his thoughts were not so void of matter; and he muttered words which showed how deeply some parts of his late conversation—those which had seemed to affect him but little at the time—had in reality sunk into his heart. "He is quieted for the present," he said, "and he must do out his work,—but he must die,—I fear me he must die; and yet my heart fails me to think it. Why and how did he learn so much? and why was he mad enough to breathe it when he had learned it? But I must think more ere I determine. Those papers! he added,—those papers,—if I could but get at those papers! Whatever hearsay knowledge he may have gained, he could make out nothing without those papers."

While thus—muttering to himself broken sentences of the dark purposes which dwelt within his own bosom—the druggist pursued his way homeward, Albert Maurice retired to his bedchamber in the town-house, and summoned his attendants to aid in undressing him. No man really more despised the pomp and circumstance of state; but since he had taken upon himself the government of Flanders,—for the power he had assumed was little less,—he had in some degree affected a style of regal splendour, and attendants of all kinds waited his commands. The necessity of captivating the vulgar mind by show, and of impressing on the multitude respect for the office that he held, was the excuse of the young citizen to himself and others; but there

was something more in it all than that,—a sort of flattering stimulus to hope and expectation was to be drawn from the magnificence with which he surrounded himself; and he seemed to feel, that the thought of winning Mary of Burgundy was something more than a dream, when he found himself in some sort acting the monarch in her dominions. He felt, too,—and there might be a charm in that also,—that he acted the monarch well; and that the robes he had assumed became him, while the native dignity of his whole demeanour, and the unaffected ease with which he moved amidst the splendour he displayed, dazzled the eyes of those who surrounded him, so that he met nothing but deference and respect from all.

He slept that night as calmly in the couch of state, as if he had been born amongst the halls of kings; and he was still in the arms of slumber, when a page woke him, announcing as Ganay had predicted, that the Princess required his presence at the palace with all speed. He instantly rose, and dressing himself in such guise as might become him well without incurring a charge of ostentatious presumption, he proceeded to obey the summons he had received; and was led at once to the presence of Mary of Burgundy.

The Princess, as usual, was not absolutely alone; for one of her female attendants—the same who had accompanied her during the thunderstorm in the forest of Hannut—now remained at the farther extremity of the room, but at such a distance as to place her out of earshot. It was, indeed, as well that it should be so; for Mary was prepared to plead to her own subject, for the life of her faithful servants,—an humiliation to which the fewer were the witnesses admitted, the better. The feeling of the degradation to which she submitted, was not without a painful effect upon Mary's heart, however gentle and yielding that heart might be; and the struggle between anxiety to save the ancient friends of her father and herself, and the fear of descending from her state too far, wrote itself in varying characters upon her countenance, which weeks of painful thoughts and fears had accustomed too well to the expression of agitated apprehension.

It was still, however, as beautiful a picture of a bright and gentle soul as ever mortal eye rested on; and as Albert Maurice gazed upon it, half shrouded as it was by the long black mourning veil which the Princess wore in memory of her father's death, he could not but feel that there was a power in loveliness like

that, to shake the sternest resolves of his heart, and turn him all to weakness. The agitation of his own feelings, too,—the hopes that would mount, the wishes that could not be repressed,—rendered him anxiously alive to every varying expression of Mary's face; and without the vanity of believing that all he saw spoke encouragement to himself, he could not but dream that the colour came and went more rapidly in her cheek, that her eye more often sought the ground while speaking to him, than in the most earnest consultation with her other counsellors. Perhaps, indeed, it was so; but from far other causes than his hopes would have led him to believe. Seldom called to converse with him but in moments of great emergency, Mary was generally more moved at such times than on other occasions, and when agitated, the eloquent blood would ever come and go in her cheek, with every varying emotion of her heart.

In him, too, she met one of a class with which she was unaccustomed to hold any near commune; and, at the same time, there was a power, and a freshness, and a graceful enthusiasm in all the young burgher's demeanour, which never can be without effect upon so fine a mind as that of the Princess. Perhaps, too, —though had she ever dreamed that such a thing as love for her could enter into his imagination, she would have been as cold as ice itself—Perhaps, too, she might feel that there was something of admiration in the young burgher's eyes, which she would not encourage, but at which she could not feel offended, and which she might have done something to check, had she not felt afraid of wounding and alienating one whom it was her best interest to attach. Nevertheless, it might be the very desire of doing so, and the fear of giving pain, that agitated her still more, and rendered her manner more changeful and remarkable.

Such were their mutual feelings,—varying through a thousand fine shades, which would require a far more skilful hand than that which now writes to portray,—when they met on that eventful morning, the sovereign to solicit and the subject to deny.

A few words explained to Albert Maurice the cause of the call he had received to Mary's presence; and the occasion having once been explained, she went on, with gentle but zealous eloquence, with a flushed cheek and a glistening eye, to beseech him, by every motive that she thought likely to move his heart, to save the lives of her faithful servants.

"Indeed, dear lady," he replied, "you attribute to me more power than I possess; for much I fear, that, even were I most anxious to screen two men, accused of selling their native land to a foreign prince, from a judicial trial and judgment, I should be totally unable to bring such a thing to pass. Willingly, most willingly, would I lay down my own life for your service, madam, and be proud to die in such a cause; but to pervert the course of justice would be a far more bitter task to Albert Maurice than to die himself."

"But remember, sir! oh, remember!" replied Mary, "that we are told to show mercy, as we hope for mercy; and still further remember, that, in their dealings with France, the Lords of Imbercourt and Hugonet were authorized by my own hand; and if there were a crime therein committed, I am the criminal alone! The act was mine, not theirs, as under my commands they went."

"Your Grace is too generous," replied the young burgher, "to take upon yourself so great a responsibility, when, in truth, it is none of yours. How reluctant you were to treat with France, no one knows better than I do; and what unjust means must have been used to induce you, I can full well divine."

"Nay, nay, indeed!" she said; "it was my voluntary act,—done upon due consideration; and no one is to blame, save myself."

"If, lady," rejoined Albert Maurice, speaking in a low but solemn tone, "if you, indeed, do wish for this French alliance,—if you desire to unite yourself with your father's pertinacious enemies,—if, as your own voluntary act, you would give your hand to the puny boy, whose numbered days will never see him sovereign of France, and who can alone serve to furnish a new claim to Louis XI. for annexing your territories to his own—if, I say, such be your own sincere desire, I will, most assuredly, announce it to the States General."

"If I say that it is so, will it save the lives of my two faithful servants?" demanded Mary, anxiously, while her heart beat painfully with the struggle between the desire of rescuing her counsellors, and her shrinking abhorrence of the marriage proposed to her. "Will it,—tell me,—will it save them?"

"I cannot promise that it will," replied Albert Maurice. "The States must decide, whether those who counselled such an act are not still most guilty, though your Grace was prevailed upon

to sanction it. Nor, lady, must you think that such a sacrifice on your part would achieve even the pacification of France and Burgundy. Be assured, that there is not an unbought man in all Flanders who would not shed the last drop of his blood ere he would consent to the union of the two countries. Nor do I believe that Louis of France himself would accede. He claims the whole of your lands, madam, upon other titles. Burgundy he calls his own by right of male descent; the districts of the Somme he declares to have been unjustly wrung from the crown of France; and the counties of Flanders and Artois, he says, are his of right, though he has not yet deigned to yield a specification of his claim. Doubtless he has striven to buy your servants and your counsellors; and many of them has he purchased—not to promote your union with his son, but to betray your lands and cities into his power."

"But these faithful friends," said Mary, "these noble gentlemen whom you now hold in captivity, are all unsoiled by such a reproach."

"Your pardon, madam," replied Albert Maurice, gravely; "such is one of the chief crimes with which they are charged. Good evidence, too, it is said, can be produced against them; and though I have not myself examined the proofs, yet I fear they will be found but too strong."

Mary stood aghast—not that she believed the accusation for a moment, but that any one should find means of advancing even such a pretext against those whose honour seemed in her eyes too bright for such a stain to rest upon them for a moment. "Oh, save them!" she exclaimed, at length, with passionate eagerness. "Save them, sir, if you love honour, if you love justice! Look there," she continued, advancing to the high window of the apartment, and pointing with her hand to the scene spread out below—"Look there!"

Albert Maurice gazed out, in some surprise. It was, indeed, as fair a sight as ever he had looked upon. The situation of the casement at which he stood, in a high tower, long since demolished, commanded an extensive view over the whole country round. The sun had not risen above an hour. The world was in all the freshness of early spring. The mists and dews of night, flying from before the first bright rays of day, had gathered together in thin white clouds, and were skimming rapidly towards the horizon, leaving the sky every moment more blue and clear.

Ghent lay yet half asleep beneath the palace, with its rivers and its canals constantly gleaming in, here and there, amongst the grey, sober-coloured houses, while innumerable monasteries, with their green gardens, and churches, with their tall spires, broke the monotony both of colour and of form, and pleasantly diversified the scene. As the eye wandered on over the walls, past the suburbs, through a maze of green fields and young plantations, a fair, undulating country met its view, interspersed with deep, brown woods, from which, every now and then, rose a village spire, or a feudal tower, while the windings of the Scheldt and the Lys, with every now and then an accidental turn of the Lieve, were seen glistening like streams of silver through the distant prospect. Over all the ascending sun was pouring a flood of the soft light of spring, while the clouds, as they flitted across the sky, occasionally cut off his beams from different parts of the view, but gave a more sparkling splendour, by contrast, to the rest.

"Look there!" said Mary of Burgundy—"look there!—Is not that a fair scene?" she added, after a moment's pause.—"Is not that a beautiful land?—Is it not a proud and pleasant thing to be lord of cities like this, and countries like that before you? Yet let me tell you, sir, I would sacrifice them all. I would resign power and station, the broad lands my father left me, the princely name I own—ay, and never drop a tear to know them lost for ever, so that I could save the life of those two noble gentlemen now in such peril by false suspicions. Oh, sir, I beseech, I entreat; and, did it beseem either of us, I would cast myself at your feet to implore that you would save them. You can,—I know you can; for well am I aware of all the power which, not unjustly, your high qualities have obtained amongst your fellow citizens. Oh, use it, sir, for the noblest, for the best of purposes!—use it to save them at my entreaty, and for my sake."

As she spoke, agitation, eagerness, and grief overcame every other consideration, and the tears streamed rapidly over her fair cheeks, while, with clasped hands, and raised-up eyes, she sought to move her hearer. Nor was he unmoved. On the contrary, he was shaken to the very heart. That stern determination which he thought virtue, the ambition which rose up beside patriotism, and was beginning to overtop the nobler shoot—all were yielding to the more powerful force of love; or, if they struggled, struggled

but feebly against that which they could not withstand. His temples throbbed, his cheek turned pale, his lip quivered, and words were rising to utterance which might, perhaps, have changed the fate of nations, when quick steps and loud voices in the ante-chamber attracted the attention both of himself and the Princess.

"Stand back, sir!" exclaimed the coarse tones of the Duke of Gueldres. "By the Lord! if the Princess is in council with any one, as you say, the more reason that I should be present at it. Am not I one of her counsellors, both by birth and blood?"

By this time he had thrown open the door; and, striding boldly into the chamber, he advanced with a "Good morrow, fair cousin: if you be in want of counsellors, here am I ready to give you my best advice."

Mary's cheek turned pale as he approached; but she replied, mournfully, "My best and most tried counsellors have been taken from me, sir, and I know not in whom I may now trust."

"Trust in me, fair cousin, trust in me," replied the Duke; but Albert Maurice interrupted him.

"I believe, sir," he said, "that it is customary for the Princess, when she wants the counsel of any individual, to send for him, and for none to intrude themselves upon her without such a summons. I, having been so honoured this morning, and having received her commands, shall now leave her, doubting not that she will be well pleased that we both retire."

"School not me, Sir Citizen," replied the Duke of Gueldres, fiercely; "for, though you fly so high a flight, by the Lord! I may find it necessary some day to trim your wings."

Albert Maurice replied only by a glance of withering contempt, which might have stung the other into some new violence, had not Mary interposed. "I did not think to see such wrangling in my presence, gentlemen," she said, assuming at once that air of princely dignity which became her station; "I would be alone.—You may retire!" and for a single instant the commanding tone, and the flashing eye, reminded those who saw her of her father, Charles the Bold.

The rude Duke of Gueldres himself was abashed and overawed; and, having no pretence prepared for remaining longer, he bowed, and strode gloomily towards the door, satisfied with having interrupted the conversation of the Princess and Albert Maurice, of which he had from some source received intimation.

The young citizen followed, not sorry to be relieved from entreaties which had nearly overcome what he believed to be a virtuous resolution, although—with that mixture of feelings from which scarcely any moment in human life is exempt—he was pained and angry, at the same time, to be forced to quit the society of one so beloved, however dangerous that society might be to his well considered purposes. He bowed low as he departed; and Mary, dropping the tone of authority she had assumed, with clasped hands, and an imploring look, murmured, in a low tone, "Remember! oh, remember!"

The Duke of Gueldres proceeded down the stairs before him, with a heavy step and a gloomy brow. Nevertheless, that prince, whose cunning and whose violence were always at war with each other, only required a short time for thought, to perceive that he could not yet, amidst the bold designs which had been instilled into his mind, dispense with the assistance and support of the young citizen; and he determined, as speedily as possible, to do away any unfavourable impression which his rude insolence might have left upon the mind of the other.

"Master Albert Maurice," he said, as soon as they had reached the vestibule below, "i'faith I have to beg your pardon for somewhat sharp speech but now. Good sooth, I am a hasty and a violent man, and you should not cross me."

"My lord duke," replied Albert Maurice, gravely, but not angrily, "your apology is more due to yourself than to me. It was the Duke of Gueldres you lowered: Albert Maurice you could not degrade; and as to crossing you, my lord,—that man's violence must be a much more terrible thing than I have ever met with yet, that could scare me from crossing him when I felt it my duty to do so."

The Duke of Gueldres bit his lip, but made no reply; for there was a commanding spirit about the young burgher, which, supported by the great power he possessed in the state, the other felt he could not cope with, at least till he had advanced many steps farther in popular favour. He turned away angrily, however, seeing that conciliation was also vain; and, flinging himself on his horse, rode off with the few attendants whom he had collected in haste to accompany him to the palace.

Albert Maurice returned more slowly to the town-house, clearly perceiving that the coming of the Duke of Gueldres,

in the midst of his conference with the Princess, had not been accidental, and endeavouring, as he rode on, to fix with certainty upon the person who had given that prince the information on which he had acted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DAY intervened: but at noon on that which followed, an immense, dense crowd was assembled in the open space before the town-house of Ghent. Nevertheless, though the multitude was perhaps greater than ever the Square of St. Pharaïlde had contained before, there was a stillness about it all, which spoke that men were anticipating some great event. Each one who spoke addressed his neighbour in that low tone which argues awe: but by far the greater part of the people remained perfectly silent, with their eyes turned towards the town-house, immediately in front of which stood a scaffold, hung with black cloth, supporting two low blocks of wood, and surrounded by a large party of the burgher guard. A still larger body of the same troops kept the space between the scaffold and the public building before which it was placed; and, in all, the armed force present seemed more than sufficient to keep order, and overawe the evil-disposed. In fact, the regular municipal power had been increased to an extraordinary degree during the last fortnight, both by an extended levy amongst the citizens themselves, and by the raising of a number of extraordinary companies from amongst the peasantry of the neighbouring districts, joined to all such disbanded soldiers as were willing to enrol themselves under the banners of the commune. The trained force thus at the disposal of the town-council of Ghent amounted to at least seven thousand men, and, on the morning of which we speak, a great part of this body were drawn up between the town-house and the scaffold, and in the main court of the building.

At the same time, it is to be remarked, that almost all the burghers, and a number of the peasantry of the country round about, had provided themselves with warlike weapons, since the first disturbances which followed the death of the duke; so that

the multitude which thronged the space before the town-house appeared universally in arms. The principal weapons with which they had furnished themselves were long pikes; and any one gazing over the market-place might have fancied it crowded by an immense body of dismounted lancers; but, at the same time, a number of the more wealthy were provided with swords also; and one or two appeared more in the guise of regular men-at-arms than simple citizens.

It was remarked that amidst the assembly were a number of persons with somewhat hard features and weather-beaten countenances, habited in the ordinary dress of peasants, but in general better armed than the rest of the people. These men seemed to have but few acquaintances in the town, but wherever any two of them met, they appeared instantly to recognise each other; and, by a quiet, unobtrusive, but steady movement forward, they gradually made their way one by one through the crowd, to the immediate vicinity of the scaffold. Another circumstance, also, was noticed by those persons in the crowd who employed all their vacant moments in looking about them, which was, that, close to the head of one of the bands of the burgher guard, and conversing from time to time with the officer who commanded it, appeared a young man of a powerful and active form, dressed as a common man-at-arms, with the beaver of his helmet, at what was called the half-spring; in short, so far open as to give him plenty of air, yet not sufficiently thrown up to expose his face.

In those days, it must be remembered that the appearance of men in armour had nothing extraordinary in it, either in the country or the town, and consequently such a sight was not at all uncommon in the streets of Ghent at any time; but it had become far more so since the burghers had assumed the authority they now claimed, as not a few of the rich young merchants, every now and then, chose to ape the nobles, whom they were desirous of overthrowing; and would appear in the streets, clothed, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, in complete steel.

Whether the captain of the band to whom the stranger addressed himself, was or was not previously acquainted with the man-at-arms, he seemed well pleased with his company, which certainly somewhat tended to relieve the irksome anticipation of a disagreeable duty. Their conversation, however, soon ap-

peared to turn upon more important matters; and they spoke quick and eagerly, though in so low a tone, that only a few words of what they said reached the bystanders.

"I wish them no ill, poor wretches, God knows," the captain of the band was heard to say, in reply to something the other had whispered the moment before. Two or three indistinct sentences succeeded; and then, he again answered, "If any one would begin, I would follow! we have as good a right to a say in the matter as any one else."

Again the man-at-arms spoke with him rapidly; and the other rejoined in a low and hurried tone—"Stay! I will see what the men say! Stand back, sir!" he added, pushing back, angrily, one of the crowd, who intruded upon the open space, and came within earshot. He then walked leisurely along the file of men that he commanded, speaking a few words, now to one, now to another; and then, turning back with an air of assumed indifference, he said to the person with whom he had before been speaking, "It will do! They do not want any more blood spilt. They are all murmuring, to a man. Go and talk with the captain on the other side."

While this was passing in the immediate vicinity of the scaffold, several of the persons I have described as looking like weather-beaten peasants, had, in making their way through the crowd, paused to speak with a number of the citizens; at first asking some questions in regard to the multitude, and the dark preparations before the town-house, as if ignorant of what had lately taken place in the city. They then generally proceeded to comment on the reply made to them; and then something was always said about the shame and horror of staining their market-place with public executions for state crimes which the events of a few weeks might render no crimes at all.

Thus, one of them demanded of a fat burgher, by whom he passed, "Why, what is the matter, neighbour? This looks as if they were going to cut off some one's head."

"And so they are, to be sure," replied the citizen. "They are going to do execution upon the Lord of Imbercourt, and Hugonet the Chancellor, who were condemned this morning for treating with France and receiving bribes."

"Ay, did they receive bribes?" rejoined the peasant: "that is strange enough; for I always thought that they were as free and liberal of their gold to those who needed it, as any men

living, and coveted nothing belonging to another; and those are not the sort of men, I have heard say, who usually receive bribes."

"Ay, that is true enough, indeed!" answered the citizen, with a sigh.

"But did they really receive bribes?" persevered the peasant. "Was it clearly proved?"

"No, no, I believe not," replied the citizen. "Proof they could not get—proof they could not get; but there was strong suspicion."

"'Tis hard a man should die for mere suspicion, though; for who would be safe if that were law?" said the other. "If I had been one of them, I would have appealed to the King of France and Court of Peers."

"Why, so they both did," replied the citizen; "but they are to die for all that."

"Then I would not be a citizen of Ghent for ten thousand crowns," answered the peasant; "for, by the Lord! Louis and his peers will be like to hang every one of them that he catches; and it is a sad thing to be hanged for spilling innocent blood. Were I one of the citizens of Ghent, they should never stain the market-place in such a way while I had a voice to raise against it."

"Ay, ay, it is very sad!" said the citizen: "and I dare say if any one would begin, many a man would cry out against it too."

"Well, well," answered the other, "I must forward, and see what is going on; and I hope some one *will* cry out against it."

Thus speaking, the peasant, as he seemed to be, pushed his way on for a little distance, and then, pausing by another of the citizens, held with him a short conversation, like that which we have just narrated, asking very nearly the same questions, and making very nearly the same observations on the answers he received.

The instance which has just been particularized was only one out of many; for in every part of the crowd were to be seen persons similar in appearance to the man whose conversation we have just detailed, and who acted precisely upon the same plan, though the words they made use of might be slightly different. The man-at-arms who, as we have mentioned, had been talking with the captain of one of the city bands, in accordance with the intimation he had received, was, in the meantime, making his way round to speak with the person who commanded the company at the other side of the scaffold. As, in his apparent military

capacity, he strode boldly across the space kept clear in front of the scaffold, and consequently encountered none of the impediments which might have delayed him, had he attempted to proceed through the crowd, he would, probably, soon have accomplished this purpose; but at that moment a considerable noise and disturbance was heard in the direction of the town-house, mingled with shouts of "They are coming!—they are coming!"

The ear of the man-at-arms immediately caught the sound. He paused for a single instant; and then taking a step back to a spot whence he could descry the intermediate space between the scaffold and the town-house, he saw a body of people moving from the principal entrance of that edifice, through a double line of the burgher guard. The procession consisted of a number of the municipal council, a body of various officers of state, Maillotin du Bac the prévôt maréchal, two executioners with naked axes, and the unfortunate nobles Imbercourt and Hugonet, bound and bare-headed.

The man-at-arms instantly perceived that he would not have time to accomplish what he proposed; and with three strides he placed himself once more by the side of the officer with whom he had before been speaking. Gathered at the same point were, by this time, at least a hundred and fifty of the peasant-looking men whom we have before described; and, forcing their way through the crowd in every direction, with no longer any affectation of ceremony, or regard to the convenience of those they thrust out of their way, there appeared a number of others perfectly similar in appearance. The eyes of the whole of this distinct body were evidently turned upon the man-at-arms; and it was observed that the one who stood nearest to him held something enveloped in the flap of his coarse brown coat, as if to be given at a moment's notice.

"Now," said the man-at-arms, addressing the captain of the burgher guard, "do your duty as a brave man, as a good citizen, and more,—as a good Christian, and you shall have plenty of support."

"But who are you?" demanded the captain of the guard, eyeing him eagerly:—"who are you, who so boldly promise support in such a case as this?"

"I am the Vert Gallant of Hannut," replied the man-at-arms; and at the same moment, stretching back his hand to the peasant

behind him, he received a broad green scarf and plume, the one of which he fastened instantly in his casque, and waved the other, for a moment, high in the air before he threw it over his shoulder.

The signal had an instantaneous effect. The brown coarse coats of the peasants were thrown off, and they appeared armed in steel corslets and brassards, while the distinctive marks of the well-known Green Riders of Hannut were seen boldly displayed in the midst of the streets of Ghent. Although where each of these men was making his way onward, and at the point where so many had already congregated, this sudden change occasioned a considerable sensation; yet the great body of the crowd was agitated by so many different feelings, and the tumult was at that moment so great, that the transaction did not attract general attention. Almost every one throughout the multitude was, indeed, moved by sensations of his own; and each nearly at once gave voice to those feelings, as his eye happened to catch different points in the scene that was passing in the square.

"They are coming! they are coming!" shouted some.—"Where? where?" exclaimed others.—"Who the devil are these?" cried those who saw the green riders.—"Death to the enemies of Ghent!" vociferated the fierce.—"Poor wretches! will no mercy be shown to them?" said the pitiful.—"What a large axe! How pale they look! Who are those behind?" cried others of the crowd.

In the meanwhile, the mournful procession came on. The new eschevins of Ghent, elected by the people themselves, mounted the scaffold, and ranged themselves around, to see the sentence they had lately pronounced carried into execution. The two executioners took their places by the blocks, and leaned the axes which they bore against them, while they made themselves ready to go through the preparatory part of their sad function. The condemned nobles followed after; and several members of the municipal council—but Albert Maurice was not amongst them—closed the whole, and occupied the only vacant space left at the back of the scaffold. At the same moment a gentleman in splendid arms, half concealed under a surcoat of costly embroidery, followed by a number of richly-dressed attendants, forced his way rudely through the crowd, and thrust himself close to the foot of the scaffold, on the opposite side to that where the Vert Gallant had placed himself. He then

crossed his arms upon his broad, bull-like chest, and stood gazing upon the awful scene that was proceeding above, with a look of ruthless satisfaction.

The Lord of Imbercourt at once advanced to the front of the scaffold, and gazed round upon the multitude before him. He was very pale, it is true; but his step was as firm as when he strode the council-chamber in the height of his power: and not a quiver of the lip, not a twinkle of the eyelid, betrayed that there was such a thing as fear at his heart.

"Must I die with my hands tied, like a common felon?" he said, addressing the executioner.

"Not if your lordship is prepared to die without offering resistance," replied the other.

"I am prepared, sir," answered Imbercourt, "to die as I have lived, calmly, honestly, fearlessly."

The executioner began to untie his hands; and the Vert Gallant, giving one glance round the crowd, apparently to ascertain the proximity of his followers, drew forward his sword-belt, and loosened the weapon in the sheath. Imbercourt, at the same time, was advancing as far as possible, as if to address the people, and the whole multitude, seeing it, kept a profound silence; when suddenly, in the midst of the still hush—just as the Vert Gallant of Hannut was passing round the head of the file of burgher guards, till he was within a few steps of the scaffold itself—a sweet and plaintive voice, which would have been inaudible under any other circumstances, was heard from amongst the crowd exclaiming, "Oh, let me pass! for God's sake, let me pass! They are murdering my faithful servants. Let me pass; in pity, in mercy let me pass!"

"It is the Princess! it is the Princess!" cried a number of voices: "let her pass! let her pass!" and, by an involuntary movement of feeling and compassion, the people drew hastily back on either side, and Mary of Burgundy, in the deep mourning of an orphan, with her bright hair escaped from her veil, and flowing wide over her shoulders, her face deluged in tears, and her hands clasped in agony, rushed forward into the open space, and, casting herself upon her knees before the people of Ghent, exclaimed aloud the only words she could utter, "Oh, spare them—spare them!"*

* It may be necessary to inform those who are not deeply read in the chronicles of France, that this fact is minutely accurate.

"Yes, yes," cried an honest burgher from the crowd, "we will spare them. Out upon it! has not the prince always had power to show mercy? Hark ye, neighbours, pikes and swords for Martin Fruse! On upon the scaffold! We will save them!"

"Back, false citizen; back!" cried the cavalier in the glittering dress we have described. "What, would you interrupt the course of justice? By the sun in heaven, they shall die the death!" and, drawing his sword, he threw himself between the people and the scaffold.

All was now tumult and confusion; and in one instant it seemed as if a general spirit of civil strife had seized upon every part of the multitude. Some shouted, "Mercy for them! mercy for them!" Some, "Justice! justice! slay the traitors!" Pikes were crossed, and swords were drawn on all sides. The burgher guards were as divided as the people. Mary of Burgundy was borne fainting behind the scaffold; and those upon the scaffold itself seemed paralysed by surprise and fear. But the green scarfs and burgonets of the Riders of Hannut were seen forcing their way forward through the press, in spite of all opposition; and at the same moment the thundering voice of the Vert Gallant was heard rising above everything else, "On, on to the scaffold, friends of mercy!" he cried. "Lord of Imbercourt, cast yourself over, you are amongst friends!"

Imbercourt might have done so; but he was instantly seized by Maillotin du Bac, and one of the executioners, who unhappily awoke from their first consternation in time to prevent him from seizing the opportunity which was unexpectedly presented to him.

The Vert Gallant, however, pushed forward, sword in hand. All gave way, or went down before him; the pikes opposed to his breast shivered like withered boughs beneath his arm; and he was within a yard of the spot where Imbercourt stood, when he was encountered, hand to hand, by the cavalier we have before mentioned; and each found that he had met an enemy very different from the burghers by whom they were surrounded. Each was powerful and skilful; but the Vert Gallant had, by more than twenty years, the advantage of his adversary; and feeling that the fate of Imbercourt must be decided in the twinkling of an eye — for the guards and executioners were forcing him down to the block—he showered his blows upon his adversary with a thundering rapidity that in a moment brought

him upon his knees. He was still, however, between the young cavalier and the scaffold; and, fierce with the eagerness of the encounter, Hugh of Gueldres drew back his arm, to plunge the point of his sword into the throat of his opponent, when the voice of one of the cavalier's attendants exclaimed aloud, "Save the Duke! For God's sake, save the Duke of Gueldres! Forbear! forbear!"

The Vert Gallant paused, gazing upon his prostrate enemy, with feelings that can be understood, when it is remembered that it was his own father, who, beaten down by his superior strength, lay within an inch of his sword's point, raised for the purpose of terminating their struggle by a parent's death. His eyes grew dim—his brain reeled—the sword dropped from his hand, and he fell back upon the pavement, without power or consciousness.

At the same moment, the axe of the executioner swung high in the air—there was a dull, heavy blow—a rush of dark blood poured over the scaffold; and the Lord of Imbercourt was no more.

CHAPTER XXX.

It is a sad thing for a calm, retired student, to sit down and depict the fierce and terrible passions which sometimes animate his fellow-beings; and it is scarcely possible to tell how worn and shaken his whole frame feels, after hurrying through some scene of angry violence and wild commotion. He meets, indeed, with compensations in pursuing his task. There may be a high and indescribable pleasure in portraying the better qualities of human nature in all their grand and beautiful traits; in describing sweet scenes of nature, and in striving to find latent associations between the various aspects of the material world and the mind, the feelings, or the fate of ourselves and our fellow-men. Nay, more, there may be some touch of satisfaction—part self-complacency, part gratified curiosity—in tracing the petty things of humanity mingling with the finer ones, the mighty and the mean counterbalancing each other within the same bosom, and in discovering that the noblest of recorded earthly beings

is linked on to our little selves by some fond familiar fault or empty vanity. But at the same time, though not so wearing as to paint the struggle of mighty energies called forth on some great occasion, it is even more painful, perhaps, to sit and draw the same strong passions working by inferior means, and employing the low and treacherous slave, *Cunning*, instead of the bold bravo, *Daring*. To such a picture, however, we must now turn.

It was on the evening of the day, whose sanguinary commencement we have already noticed, that, placed calmly by a clear wood fire, with all the means of comfort, and even luxury around him, Ganay, the druggist, sat pondering over the past and the future. Neither he himself, nor Albert Maurice, had appeared at the execution of Imbercourt and Hugonet—the one careless of what else occurred, so that his bitter revenge was gratified—the other naturally abhorring scenes of blood. The druggist, however,—though where it was necessary he neither wanted courage to undertake, nor hardihood to execute the most daring actions,—was ever well pleased to let more careless fools perform the perilous parts of an enterprise, employing the time, which would have been thus filled up by action, in thinking over the best means of reaping his own peculiar harvest from the seed sown by others. He now revolved every circumstance of his present situation, and scanned the future—that dim and uncertain prospect—with steady eyes, determined to force his way onward, through its mists and obstacles, without fear and without remorse.

The predominant sensation in his bosom, however, was gratification at the consummation of his long sought revenge. The man whom he most hated on earth, who had offered him a personal indignity, and who had refused pardon to his son, he had sent to join the unhappy magistrates who had condemned that base and flagitious boy; and when he contemplated the difficulties he had surmounted to bring about that act of vengeance,—the schemes he had formed and perfected,—the events which he had turned from their natural course, by his sole art, to accomplish his purpose,—the men he had used as instruments, and the passions he had bent to his designs;—when he contemplated, I say, the whole course of his triumphant machinations, there rose up in his bosom that pride of successful villany, which is so often the ultimate means of its own punishment by the daring confidence which it inspires.

The maxim of Rochefoucault is applicable to men as well as women. Where was there ever the man who paused at one evil act? Ganay had previously determined to limit all his efforts to the death of the eschevins and of Imbercourt; but his very success in that endeavour had entailed the necessity, and furnished the encouragement, to new, and, if possible, less justifiable acts. Nevertheless, it must not be thought that there was no such thing as a thrill of remorse ever entered his bosom. There probably never yet was a man, however he might brave it to the world, who, with a bosom loaded with crimes, did not feel remorse, when solitary thought left him a prey to memory. Conscience is an Antæus, that, though often cast to the earth by the Herculean passions of man's heart, rises ever again re-invigorated by its fall; and he must be strong indeed who can strangle it altogether.

Remorse mingled its bitter drop even with the cup of Ganay's triumph; and while he gazed upon the crackling embers, the joy of his successes faded away—a feeling of age, and solitude, and crime, crept over his heart; and the memories of other years, the hopes and dreams of boyhood and innocence, rose up, and painfully contrasted themselves with the mighty disappointment of successful vice. Through life he had found many means of stifling such murmurs of the heart, in the excitement of new schemes and the intricacies of tortuous policy; but now he had learned another way of lulling the mind together with the body; and, rising with his usual calm and quiet pace, he approached a cupboard, poured a small silver cup half full of ardent spirits, and then swallowed in its contents a certain portion of that narcotic which he had found so soothing under the first anguish of his son's death. Then carefully replacing the cup and the vial, he again took his seat before the fire, and listened, as if waiting for some visitor.

He was not kept long in expectation; for, in a very few minutes after, the door was opened by the boy, and Maillotin du Bac entered without farther announcement. The cheek of the Prévôt was flushed with wine, and his lip curled with triumph; but he had, by this time, learned the influence of Ganay in the affairs of Ghent too completely to treat him with aught but the most profound deference. After some formality, he took the seat that Ganay offered; and hypocras and wine having been brought in with spices and comfits, he helped himself largely, and then, at

the request of the druggist, recapitulated the events connected with the execution of the morning, which we need not repeat.

"So now," said the Prévôt, in conclusion, speaking of the unhappy Imbercourt, "he is dead, and that score is cleared. Master Ganay, I give you joy, with all my heart! Your son's death is nobly avenged, and you can sleep in peace. Now, give me joy in return."

"I do! I do! Sir Prévôt," replied Ganay, grasping the hand the other held out to him in his thin fingers: "I do! I do, with all my heart!"

"But stay! stay!" cried Maillotin du Bac, "you do not yet know for what. Hark ye, Master Ganay, revenge is sweet to every honourable man. Did you ever hear tell of the Vert Gallant of Hannut? Did you ever hear how he overpowered me by numbers, and disgraced me as a man and a knight? He delivered yon proud Albert Maurice, too, when he was a less worm than he is now. Well, he it was, who, as I tell you, encountered the good Duke of Gueldres, and would have slain him, had not his own foot slipped, or some one dashed him down, and the duke was rescued."

"Well, well, what of him?" cried the druggist; "what has befallen him?"

"Why, he is safe in the prison of the town-house," replied the Prévôt, "and shall die after seven days' torture, if I live to the end of them. His fellows, somehow, cut their way through, and got out of the press, every one of them; but he himself was trodden down as he lay, by the people, and was taken up by the burgher guard half dead, after the crowd dispersed. We shall have to give him two or three days to recover. There is no use of killing him like a rat caught in a trap, you know, and just knocking his head against the stones, without letting him know why or wherefore. No, no, we must give him time to recover his strength and his senses, or he will die upon the first wheel.—But there is more, there is more to be told still," continued the Prévôt, rather heated by the wine, and seeing that the other was about to reply? "Who, think you, this famous long concealed Vert Gallant proves to be at last? Who but the nephew of that old sorcerer, the Lord of Hannut—and by the holy cross! if ever I live to see quiet times again, that vile, heathenish wizard shall roast in the market-place of Brussels, if

there be such a thing as law and religion in the land. I knew it all the time! Bless you, Master Ganay, I saw through it all, from the time I was at the castle. I told the Lord of Imbercourt, that his nephew was the brigand leader—you may ask him if I did not,—though, by the way, he wont answer, for he is dead—but I told him, nevertheless, that I was sure it was the old man's nephew.—Master Ganay, here's to you!"

Ganay had turned somewhat pale as the other spoke: but he showed no farther sign of discomposure; and replied immediately,—"His nephew! You must mistake. He has no nephew. —He once had a son!" he added, in a voice, the tremulous tone of which the Prévôt, whose faculties had not been rendered more pellucid by the wine he had drunk, attributed to the painful remembrance of his own loss,—"he once had a son! But the boy died in infancy."

"Nay," replied Maillotin du Bac, "of that I know nothing. All I know is that this youth is his nephew—this Sir Hugh de Mortmar."

"But I tell thee, good friend, it cannot be," rejoined the druggist, somewhat sharply. "No nephew has he. Surely I should know."

"Well, well, 'tis all the same," cried the Prévôt. "If not his nephew, he passes as such; and die he shall, after the torture has racked his every limb. Ay, Master Ganay, he shall die," he added, clasping his strong and sinewy hand tight, as if holding some substance which he was determined to let no power on earth wring from his grasp; "he shall die, although your precious president were to give his right hand to save him; and if, out of what he calls his fine feelings, he attempt to repay the good turn the Vert Gallant did him at Hannut, and free him from prison in return, he may chance to stumble at that step himself, and die along with him. I owe him something, too, which I have not forgot. So let him look to it."

Ganay mused for several minutes over the words of his companion, who spoke evidently under the excitement both of passion and drink. The wine, however, had not very deeply affected his discretion; and the moment after, remembering the close connexion between the druggist and Albert Maurice, the Prévôt added, "Not that I mean any harm to your friend, Master Ganay, only let him not meddle with my prisoner, that

is all. I am sure I have reframed from seeking any vengeance against him himself, simply because he is your friend; and will not, if he keep his hands from interfering with my affairs."

Still Ganay was silent, and remained musing, with his eyes bent upon the fire, till he perceived that Maillotin du Bac,—somewhat discomposed by his companion's taciturnity, and imagining that he had made a blunder in regard to Albert Maurice,—was again about to apply to the bowl of spiced wines, as the best means of restoring his confidence and composure. At that moment the druggist, stretching out his hand, caught him gently by the arm, saying, "Stay, stay, Master Prévôt, we have both had enough of that for the present; and as we may have many things to speak of which require cool heads, let us refrain till all is settled, and then drink our fill."

"Well, well, 'tis the same to me," rejoined the Prévôt, relinquishing the bowl, and taking his seat once again. "What would you say, Master Ganay? Command me; for you know that we are linked together by the same interests, and therefore, are not likely to differ."

"Well, then, listen for a moment, good Sir Maillotin, while I just tell you a few things concerning this Lord of Hannut, which, though they belong to the days past, do not the less bear upon the days present."

The druggist then paused, and again mused for a moment in deep thought, ere he proceeded; and in his countenance there was that air of deep calculating thought, which may often be seen in the face of a skilful chess player, when pausing, with suspended finger, over some critical move. At length he went on. "We must both serve each other, Sir Maillotin; and if you will aid me in what I propose, I will help you to what you wish, though you dare not even hope for it."

"Speak, speak! Master Ganay," replied the Prévôt; "and fear not that I will refuse to serve you willingly and well. We have drawn vastly well together yet; and there is no danger of our not doing so to the end."

Still, however, the druggist hesitated for some minutes; for though he could assume a false frankness as well as any one, he was not, by nature, at all communicative, and what he had resolved, upon long deliberation, to propose to the Prévôt, required a more full confidence than he could place in any one without pain. "I will tell you a story," he said, at length,—"I will tell

you a story, good Maillotin du Bac. Listen then. 'Tis just two-and-thirty years ago since I first heard much of this Lord of Hannut, who was then a bright, brave young cavalier, whose life was not to be counted on for two hours together, so much was his courage better than his prudence. He had—as well you know he still has—ample wealth and large possessions, while his cousin, the present Duke of Gueldres, whose father was then living, was so munificent a prince, as often to be pinched for a hundred florins. Report said that the young duke, who was then heir to Hannut, piously wished that his gallant cousin might find the road to heaven speedily. But, as fate would have it, the Lord of Hannut one day unexpectedly married, and within a year, his fair lady made him the father of a son, of which she was delivered at their pleasure-house of Lindenmar. All this went mightily against the stomach of the good young Lord of Gueldres, whose father, then living, kept him on scanty means; when, by another strange turn of fate, the pleasure-house of Lindenmar was burnt to the ground, and the infant son of the young Lord of Hannut perished in the flames. As fortune would have it, a detachment of Duke Philip's army was marching over the hill, within sight at the time, and with it was my good Lord of Gueldres, together with Thibalt of Neufchâtel, and a number of other knights and nobles. As soon as the fire was discovered, they all galloped down to put out the flames; and my Lord of Gueldres might have passed for as zealous a friend as the rest, had he not been fool enough to cry out, as if in jest, to let the whole place burn, so that he had the lands of Hannut."

"He had better have kept that to himself," interrupted the Prévôt, shaking his head sagaciously. "No man has a worse enemy than his own tongue. The good duke should have learned that it is better never to let people know one's wishes, for they are never long in discovering one's designs afterwards."

"He has marred all his good fortune through life," replied Ganay, "by those rough sayings of his; for though he says no more than other men think, yet he makes all men that hear him his enemies, by exposing their feelings while confessing his own.

"However," continued the druggist, after this sage and liberal observation, "down he came with the rest, of course, to make them think what he had said was a mere joke, and plunged into the flames with the foremost. All was confusion, and no one

knew what the other was doing. The Lord of Hannut himself was stunned by the fall of a beam upon his head, and was with difficulty dragged out by his servants. Thibalt of Neufchâtel, his great friend and brother in arms, carried out the lady unhurt, through the midst of the flames: but the heir of Hannut perished; and, for some hours, no one could tell what had become of Adolphus of Gueldres."

"Why you describe it all as well as if you had been there yourself," said Maillotin du Bac.

"I was there," replied the druggist, drily; "but you shall hear. What put it into Thibalt of Neufchâtel's head, I know not; but, after saving the lady, he rushed back again into the house, and, finding me in the further wing, he dragged me out by the hair of the head, vowing that I had kindled the fire. Now, you must know that I was then a humble friend and domestic surgeon to the young Duke of Gueldres; and when they searched my person, they found a number of letters, which they thought of very doubtful meaning, and a few drugs, the use of which their ignorance could not comprehend, and which they wanted much to prove were materials for secretly lighting a flame. The good duke, too, was not present; and, under all these circumstances, they had nearly killed me on the spot. I took it all silently, for a man can but die once in this world, and very little does it matter when that once may fall. All I said was, to call my young lord, for that he would clear me; and they agreed, at length, to spare me till the duke, that is at present, could be found. He was not heard of, however, till the next day, when it was discovered that he had retired to a neighbouring village, much scorched by the flames. He instantly despatched a letter to the Lord of Neufchâtel, informing him that he himself had sent me to inquire after the health of his fair cousins, the Lord and Lady of Hannut, which was the cause that I had not been seen accompanying him with the rest of the army. The servants of the household of Lindenmar vouched for my coming the evening before on that errand, and gave a good report of my proceedings. The Lord of Hannut himself joined to exculpate me; and I easily found means to convince Thibalt of Neufchâtel that he had grossly ill-treated me, and foully aspersed my character. Had he continued to treat me ill, I might have devised a way to satisfy myself; but, on the contrary, as soon as he was

convinced of my innocence, nothing would serve him to testify his sorrow for what had occurred, and to compensate the injury he had inflicted. He kept his eye upon me through life, and, I may well say, has been the origin of all my fortunes. The proofs he gathered together of the charge against me, and of my innocence, he has always kept in his own possession; and I have not chosen to press for their being given up to me, lest it should seem that I was afraid of anything therein contained. Do you understand me?"

"Quite well," replied Maillotin du Bac, drawing his clear hawk's eyes together, with a shrewd glance upon the druggist's face; "quite well. What more?"

"Why this," answered the druggist:—"I love not to be in the power of any man. While Adolphus of Gueldres was in prison, and likely to remain there,—while Thibalt of Neufchâtel was living, and likely to live,—the matter did not much signify; but now that Adolphus of Gueldres is free, and that Thibalt of Neufchâtel is dying of the wounds he received at Nancy, it might be as well that those papers were in my own possession. Thus, then, it must be managed, Sir Prévôt: you must find some excuse to take possession of his house with your men-at-arms the moment the breath is out of his body; and while you are sealing up the effects, I may be looking for the papers."

"But what, suppose I keep them in my possession for you?" demanded Maillotin du Bac, with one of his shrewd looks.

"Why, then," replied the druggist, calmly, "I cannot aid you in overthrowing Albert Maurice, and in obtaining possession of his person and his wealth."

"I understand," said the Prévôt; "we are agreed. But what surety have I that you will do so when you have the papers?"

"This," answered Ganay, without any expression of indignation at a doubt of his honesty, which he felt to be perfectly natural, but, at the same time, approaching closer to the Prévôt, and speaking in a low, but clear and emphatic tone,—"this, that Albert Maurice—by what means I know not—has discovered my secret, and must die."

"Good! good!" replied the Prévôt; "'t is better than a bond! We are agreed, we are agreed, mine excellent good friend. But, hark ye, Ganay, there is one bad stone in the arch. This Thibalt of Neufchâtel—this good Count Thibalt—is marvellously better

to-day. It would seem that the death of Imbercourt and Hugonet had done him good; for, about the time of the axe falling, he began to mend."

Ganay, as was his habit when he heard any unpalatable tidings, replied nought, but fixed his eyes upon the fire, and mused. "He is an old man," said the druggist, at length, speaking in a low and quiet voice,—"he is an old man, this good Count Thibalt."

"Ay, doubtless is he," replied Maillotin du Bac, who was one of those people who take a keen delight in discovering difficulties and objections, solely for the sake of giving pain and disappointment to those whom they were likely to thwart; "but he is a hale old man, and may live these twenty years, if he get over this bout."

"He must have had enough of life," continued Ganay, in the same meditative tone. "It is time he were asleep. Adolphus of Gueldres has visited his sick couch more than once—It is time he were asleep."

The Prévôt was silent; and Ganay, after considering his hawk-like features for a moment or two with an inquiring glance, added quietly, "Well, well, Sir Maillotin, we will see. These sudden gleams of convalescence often precede death in the badly wounded. I know these matters better than you do, my good friend; and I have no faith in this sudden and strange amendment. Let us keep ourselves in readiness, and wait the result.—You will be prepared at a moment's notice," he added, in a more sharp and decided tone, throwing off at once the quiet conversational manner of his former speech; "perchance he may die to-morrow—perchance the next day; but be you on the watch, and ever ready to secure the house."

"I will! I will!" answered Maillotin du Bac; and then speaking to the druggist's purpose more than to his words, he added, "I will be ready to secure the house and all that, Master Ganay; but I can do no more in this business. To take men off except by the cord or the steel, when they have merited their fate, is out of my line of operations."

"Who required you to do so?" demanded the druggist, gravely. "No, no, Sir Prévôt, men may die without your help or mine either. So, now to the bowl! We understand each other, and that is enough. Be you ready when I send to warn you that the good count is dead. If he live, you know—which is likely—vastly likely;—if he live—why all the rest is in the moon. Sir

Prévôt, I carouse to your good rest this night. Do me justice—do me justice in the bowl!"

Thus ended their more important conversation; and all that passed farther referred to the mysteries of the tankard, and need not be here inflicted on the reader. It may be necessary to observe, however, that the druggist did not suffer the Prévôt Maréchal to leave his house till he had imbibed a sufficient quantity of various kinds of intoxicating liquors to require the aid of two stout men to bear him home; and that Ganay himself was, at the same time, incapable of quitting the chair in which he sat.

It may be asked, was a man of such subtle schemes an habitual drunkard, then? Far from it, though he could drink as deep as any one, when some object might be gained by so doing: but he was one of those men whose limbs only became inebriated, if we may use such an expression, while their brain remains unclouded; and the debauch in which he indulged was one of calculation, not pleasure. He had soon seen that, in the case of the Prévôt, the prudent guard which was usually placed upon his lips was half asleep at the post long before their conversation was over; and though he believed that he could trust to old habits of caution to keep his companion from any indiscreet babbling, either drunk or sober, yet he determined not to let him leave his dwelling till utterance itself was drowned in wine. Of himself he had no fear; and, leaning on his boy, he tottered to his bed in silence.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Oh, the dull silent hours of the night, when not a sound stirs upon the heavy air to steal one thought from man's communion with his own dark heart!—when the stern silence renders the sleep that covers all the world more like one universal death, and everything around us bids our conscience scan the brief records of our past existence, and prejudge us for the long eternity! The days had been, when, on a clear spring-tide night, like that,—while all the countless stars seemed living diamonds in the heaven,—Albert Maurice, full of fine soul and

noble aspirations, would have gazed forth enchanted; and, without one heavy tie between his heart and the low earth, would have bade his spirit soar up in grand, calm dreams to heaven—when, between him and the multitude of bright orbs that sparkled before his eyes, there would have been felt a communion and a sympathy; and when the knowledge that each wondrous frame was the creation of the same Almighty hand, would have awakened in his bosom a feeling of kindred with the living lights of the sky. But now, how heavy was the night! how dark! how hopeless! how reproachful! There was a voice even in the solemn stillness; and the blood, which yet reeked upon the scaffold beneath the very windows of the apartment where he sat, seemed crying up, through the silence of the universe, to the Judge enthroned above those eternal stars.

He was left, too, entirely alone, and had been so during the greater part of the day; for such was the awful sensation produced in Ghent by the events of the morning, that all the shops were shut, and every kind of business was very generally suspended. Even the affairs of the city seemed to be neglected by general consent. Neither the council of the town, nor the deputies of the States, returned to consult over the future. Nor was it the higher functionaries alone that seemed to feel this sort of bewildered apathy. The clerks and secretaries were absent; not above one or two of the many couriers usually in attendance were now found in readiness; and Albert Maurice, after having endeavoured, in vain, to occupy his mind with business during the day, found himself, at night, left in utter solitude, to revolve the tragedy of the morning, without any other thing to distract his thoughts, or any voice to plead his cause against the accusation of his own conscience.

He strove, however, to convince himself that he had acted justly. He read over the evidence against the dead. He read over the sentence of the judges. He thought over all the many specious reasons that had before seemed to afford a thousand clear and patriotic excuses for sweeping away those whose views were likely to thwart his own: but the reasons had lost their force; the sentence was manifestly unjust; the evidence was broken and inconclusive.

"At all events," he thought, "the act is not mine; the award has been pronounced by the lawful magistrates of the land; and I have taken no part either in the judgment or its execution."

But that pretext would not avail a moment before the stern inquisitor within; and he felt that he, in whom the real power lay, if he did not interpose to shield the innocent, made himself responsible for their blood.

The heart of man cannot long endure such racking self-examination; and the most dangerous resource, but the only refuge from present pain, is flight from thought. As sad an hour's commune with himself as ever sinful human being passed, ended with Albert Maurice, in a resolution to think no more of the unchangeable hours of the past, and to fix his mind upon the present. After pausing for a moment, during which his ideas wandered confusedly over a number of objects, without finding any subject of contemplation of sufficient importance to withdraw his thoughts, for an instant, from the engrossing theme that ever called them back with painful importunity, some sudden memory seemed to come across him; and, taking up one of the lamps, he proceeded into the antechamber, in which waited several of his attendants. Giving the light to a page, with orders to go on before, the young citizen paced slowly through several of the halls and corridors of the town-house, his footfall, ever firm and proud, taking now a more heavy and determined step, from the feeling of the dark, stern deeds which he had done. Descending one of the staircases, he came to that portion of the building which was set apart as the municipal prison; and, proceeding to a small chamber or lodge, he demanded the keys of the gaoler, who was dozing by the fire.

The man immediately delivered them; and, passing onwards, the President of the States entered the gloomy dwelling, and descended the staircase which led to the lowest chambers of the prison. He was surprised, however, to perceive a light; and the moment after, in the low passage which ran between six or seven small heavy archways leading to the cells, his eye fell upon a trooper of the prévôt's guard, seated upon a stone bench at the end, employed in furbishing the steel of his partisan by the light of a lamp above his head.

The man instantly started on his feet; and, challenging the party that approached, advanced his weapon, till it nearly touched the bosom of the page. But Albert Maurice, stepping past the boy, put the pike aside, and demanded, sternly, what the soldier did there, in the municipal prison.

He was there, the man replied, by order of his captain, and

was commanded to give admission to none, but the gaoler with food for the prisoner.

"Your officer is somewhat too bold!" replied the young burgher, "and must answer for having dared to place a sentry where he himself has no authority. Get thee gone, good fellow —you know me—get thee gone; and let me not see your face within these walls again."

The man at first hesitated; and at length refused to obey, alleging, civilly, the commands of his own captain, which he was bound to follow. Well knowing the station and power of the person whom he addressed, he spoke with courtesy and respect; but Albert Maurice was in that state of dissatisfied irritation, which the first reproaches of conscience leave upon a fine and energetic mind; and, returning to the upper chambers, he instantly summoned a guard, and caused the soldier to be disarmed, and confined him in one of the very dungeons he had been placed to watch.

There was a stern fierceness in the whole proceeding, unlike his usual decisive but mild demeanour; and those who watched him well, remarked, that upon his mind and character, such as they had appeared throughout the whole course of his life, that day had left a trace which no after-events could obliterate. When he had seen his orders obeyed, he dismissed the guard, and bidding the page wait him on the stairs, he advanced alone to one of the cells and applied the various keys he carried to the lock. It was some time before he found the right one; and he thought he heard more than one low groan, while employed in opening the door. At length, however, he succeeded, and entered the dungeon, which was dark and dismal enough.

Stripped of arms, both offensive and defensive, and stretched upon a pile of straw, lay the gallant and enterprising Hugh de Mortmar, as we have generally called him, with every limb powerless and rigid, in consequence of the trampling and blows he had received while trodden under foot in the market-place. His fine head leaned languidly upon his arm, while, with a motion which, however slight, seemed full of anguish, he turned a little as he lay, to see who it was that visited his prison. The light, for a moment, dazzled his eyes; but when he perceived the face of Albert Maurice, a slight smile of pleasure played on his lip. It was a face he knew—it was a being on whom he had some claim, that came to visit him; and it is only necessary to think over his

situation—friendless, a prisoner, and alone, with every mental power oppressed, and every corporeal faculty rigid and benumbed—to comprehend what joy such a sight must have given, however criminal he might hold some of his visiter's deeds to be.

The young citizen set down the lamp, and seated himself on a rude wooden settle, which was the only article of furniture that the place contained. Bending down his head over the prisoner, he said, in a kind and gentle tone,—"Do you remember me?"

"Well—very well," replied the young cavalier, faintly; "we have changed stations since we met."

"You will find me ready," answered Albert Maurice, "to follow the good example you then set me, and to give you back freedom, for the freedom you then gave me."

Hugh de Mortmar shook his head mournfully, and cast his eyes upon his stiff and rigid limbs, as if to express the impossibility of his accepting the proffered liberation.

"Fear not, fear not!" said Albert Maurice, in reply to this mute language. "Fear not; in two or three days you will be able to use your limbs as freely as ever, and I will find means to remove from them all other thraldom."

"But my father," exclaimed Hugh de Mortmar. "Tell me, I beseech you, tell me!—Is he safe? Is he unhurt?"

"Your father!" repeated Albert Maurice, in some surprise,—"your father?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the prisoner, raising himself as well as he could upon his arm,—"my father—the Duke of Gueldres!—Is he safe? Is he unhurt? I struck him down before I knew him; but I do not think he was injured."

"No, no," replied the young citizen, "the duke is safe and well. But this, indeed, is a strange tale. I do not comprehend you well, I fear," he added, somewhat inclined to believe that the injuries the prisoner had received had rendered him delirious. "Can the Duke of Gueldres be your father? I never heard that he had more than one child, who was slain, they say, by some of the cruel soldiers of the late Duke of Burgundy's father, when Adolphus of Gueldres himself was taken near Namur. I remember all the circumstances; for there was many an event occurred about that time which impressed the whole story more deeply on my memory than other things that have happened since. I was then a boy, travelling with my uncle through the

forest of Hannut, and we had been at Namur not three days before."

"Ha! and were you that boy?" demanded the young cavalier. "I remember you well. You fell into the hands of the free companions with whom I then was, and were sent on safely by them, and by my father's noble cousin, the Lord of Hannut. Mind you the boy who joined you, with good Matthew Gournay, when you were sitting round the freebooter's fire in the forest?"

"Well, perfectly well," replied Albert Maurice.

"Then, that was the son of Adolphus of Gueldres," rejoined the prisoner, "escaped from the hands of the sworders of the Duke of Burgundy, and flying to seek and find protection and concealment with his father's cousin, the Lord of Hannut. Such was the boy, and I am he."

"These things are very strange," said Albert Maurice; "and if you knew all that I know, you would say so.—Most strange, indeed!" he muttered to himself, "that the bereaved father should become a second parent to the son of him who made him childless.—But let your heart rest satisfied!" he added, aloud; "your father is well and safe; and you have not even an unconscious crime to reproach yourself with."

He spoke mournfully, and then fell into a deep, long fit of thought, from which he was only roused by the young cavalier demanding, whether the noble Lord of Imbercourt had been saved, after all?

What were the thoughts at that moment in the bosom of Albert Maurice—whether his mind rested painfully on the consciousness that he could no longer boast of a guiltless heart, and pondered, with all the bitter, wringing agony of crime, upon the blessed sweetness of innocence—can only be guessed; but an involuntary groan burst from the lips of the young citizen at the question of the prisoner, and he clasped his hands upon his eyes.

Removing them an instant after, he answered, gazing somewhat sternly upon his companion,—"He died as he deserved."

Hugh of Gueldres replied not; but, feeble as he was, returned the stern glance of Albert Maurice with one still more severe and reproachful. The young citizen recovered himself, however, at once, banished the frown from his brow, and, for the moment, even stifled the regret within his bosom. "Let us not speak, my lord," he said, "on matters of painful discussion. The man you asked for, was tried and condemned by lawful judges, upon

what they considered sufficient evidence. He suffered this morning according to his sentence. Suffice it, that I had no personal hand either in his doom or execution."

"Thank God for that!" said Hugh de Mortmar; "for I do believe that I should look upon even liberty as stained, if received from the hands of one who, for envy or ambition, could do two such noble men to death as died this day in Ghent."

The blood rushed violently up to the face and temples of Albert Maurice; and, for a moment, he felt so giddy, that he started up and leaned against the wall for support. What he had said was true, indeed, to the letter; but conscience told him, that he was not only an accessory, but a principal in the death of Imbercourt; and, though he had spoken truth, he nevertheless felt that he had deceived. There was again a bitter struggle in his bosom; but it was soon over, for the presence of another person shamed him into conquering the upbraidings of his own heart.

"Let us say no more on that subject, my lord," he rejoined, as soon as he had somewhat recovered his calmness. "It is a matter on which you and I cannot, I fear, agree. I am bound, in justice to the States of Flanders and the magistrates of Ghent, to say boldly, that I think they have done nobly, firmly, and well; and though I took no part in the act itself, yet the opinion of no man on earth will make me shrink from avowing, that I would have done the same. But all this has nothing to do with the feelings between you and me. Suffice it, that I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, which I am ready and willing to pay. You shall be instantly removed from this dungeon to a more convenient chamber, where you shall be tended with all care, till such time as you have recovered strength. If you will, your existence and your situation shall be immediately communicated to the Duke of Gueldres. But still, I think——"

"No, no," answered the prisoner, quickly; "no, no; if there be any other means whatever of obtaining my freedom, without revealing who I am, let me still remain concealed for a certain space. I know not well whether the news of my existence might, or might not, be well received. There are new plans and views abroad, I find, with which my appearance might interfere. My father, I hear, aims at the hand of the heiress of Burgundy."

A scornful smile curled the lip of Albert Maurice, while the

other proceeded:—"And I know not how he might love to hear, that a son he has believed to be dead for twenty years, had now arisen to cumber his inheritance. Let us pause for a time and see.—Nor, indeed, would I willingly be found a prisoner."

"I think you judge rightly, my lord," replied the young citizen; "though the Duke of Gueldres will never marry Mary of Burgundy. But, as to your freedom," he added, cutting short something that the prisoner was about to reply, "for that I will pledge my life; and, when once more beyond the walls of Ghent, you can act as you will in regard to discovering yourself."

The motives of Hugh of Gueldres for wishing to conceal his existence from his father for some time longer, were certainly those which he had stated; but perhaps he might also be influenced by another feeling. In mingling with men who knew him not for what he was, the name of his father had never reached his ears, but coupled with some opprobrious epithet, or in conjunction with some evil deed; and perhaps a lingering disinclination to claim kindred with such a man, might make him still glad to leave his station unacknowledged to the world.

Some farther conversation then ensued between the President of Ghent and the son of the Duke of Gueldres; and though Albert Maurice became often thoughtful and abstracted—though there was a varying and uncertain tone in everything he said, unlike his usual calm and dignified manner; yet, from the nature of the subjects to which they now both restricted themselves, there was something sweet and pleasing in the commune which they indulged. They spoke of the early days in which they had first met—of the times, and the scenes, and the pleasures, and the hopes of other years; and a kindly sympathy breathing from the past, made for them, even in the prison, and separate as they were by state, by station, by education, and by prejudices, a peculiar atmosphere in which they seemed to live alone. Hugh de Mortmar felt it strongly, and seemed to revive under its influence. His voice became firmer, and his eye regained its light.

"And what," said Albert Maurice, after they had conversed some time on the scenes in the forest of Hannut,—"and what has become of that good stout soldier, Matthew Gournay, who was, in some sort, a friend of my worthy uncle Martin Fruse."

"He was with me, this day, in Ghent," replied the prisoner; "and I trust in God has escaped beyond the gates. Many a time also has he been the means by which I have communicated

to you, through your uncle, those proceedings which I thought it necessary that you should know. Once, not a month since, he was within the walls of Ghent; but could not obtain a private interview with you. Thus it was that you received tidings of the march of the base King of France. Thus, of the coming of his barber ambassador. Thus, too, did I send you a copy of that degraded slave's instructions."

"Then I owe you far more than I ever dreamed of," replied the young citizen, "and I will peril my life but I will repay it. Nevertheless," he added, after a moment's thought, in which suspicions, vague indeed, but strong, of the motives and designs of the druggist Ganay, rose up before his mind;—"nevertheless, although for the time I am powerful in the city, yet several days must elapse ere you can mount a horse. I have many enemies, too, many false friends, many dangerous rivals; and I would fain place your security beyond the chance of anything that may happen to myself. Think you," he added, musing, "that Matthew Gournay, with twenty of his picked companions, would venture once more within the gates of Ghent, and, habited like followers of my own, be ready to aid in your deliverance, whether I be alive or dead."

"If he have escaped," replied the prisoner, "he would come at my bidding, were it into the jaws of hell. But you must make me certain of his safety, Sir Citizen."

"That he has escaped, rest assured," replied Albert Maurice; "for no one but yourself was taken: and as for his future security," he added, with a smile, "what object think you I could have in shortening an old man's days?"

A bitter reply rose in the heart of the young cavalier, as he thought of the unhappy Lord of Imbercourt; but he felt it would be ungenerous to give it utterance, and he refrained.

"I trust you, sir!" he replied; "I saved you at a moment when you were an oppressed and injured man; and to doubt you now in such a case, would be a kind of blasphemy against the God who made the human heart. Take this ring, and send it by some sure messenger—a young boy, perchance, were best, though I do not think they would maltreat any one but an open enemy—but send it by some page in a small skiff down the Scheldt at two hours after dusk. The boat will undoubtedly be stopped—and let the page give the ring to Matthew Gournay—whom he will find in the woods between this and Heusden, if

he escaped unhurt from Ghent.—Let the boy add a message, bidding him, in my name, render himself, with twenty of his comrades, to the house of good Martin Fruse, at any hour that you may appoint. Fear not that he will meet you, and then take counsel with him as you may think fit."

Some more explanations ensued; but as Albert Maurice perceived that the prisoner was exhausted with so long a conversation, he soon after bade him farewell, and left him. "For two days," he said, as he turned to depart, "in all probability, I shall not visit you; for it may be well not to excite any suspicion of my design. But you shall be watched carefully night and day, that no foul practice be employed against you; and at the end of the third day I trust to find you well enough to bear at least a short walk to the river side. In the meantime, as they have deprived you of your arms, for greater security take this." And he placed in his hands a broad double-edged Venetian poniard, adding,—"Fear not to use it, should any one attempt to injure you; for if they do, the means they employ must be of that kind which does not court examination; and now, once more, farewell!"

The young citizen then retired; and though the more kindly and noble feelings which his conversation with Hugh of Gueldres had awakened—feelings untainted by the world's ambition or its policy—could not, it is true, stifle entirely the cry of remorse; yet there had been a balm in it all, that sent him forth soothed and softened. He retired not to his chamber till he had given orders that care and attendance should be shown to the prisoner, and that he should be removed to a better chamber; but when, at length, he cast himself upon his bed, fatigue, and the feeling that his heart was not all bitterness, brought sleep, though it was disturbed; and he woke not till the dawn looked in, and roused him from slumber.

Already, when he rose, the first poignancy of regret was gone; and the wound in his heart had grown stiff and numb. The voice of self-love was more ready to plead extenuation; and hope, always far more potent than memory, told him that mighty things might yet be derived for love and for his country, from the very deeds he so deeply regretted. At all events, policy whispered that he must not let the moments slip; and, though the immortal worm, remorse, was still slowly preying on his heart, he rose prepared to forget the pang, in all the active energy of watchful policy and great ambition.

Even while he was dressing, messenger after messenger, from different parts of the country, bearing news, not alone of the movements of friends and enemies, but also of the preparations which he himself had been labouring to complete, was admitted to his presence. After collecting the tidings that each one bore him, with a minute memory that never failed, and arranging every particular in his own mind with that methodical accuracy which rendered the whole available at a moment's notice, he descended early to the hall—where he expected soon to meet many envious and suspicious visiters—feeling that he possessed a store of ready information on every subject, which he knew must confound and overbear them all.

Strange to say—or, perhaps, not strange at all—the state of painful irritation which he now suffered, appeared to render all the faculties of his mind more acute and powerful. Naturally energetic, he had acquired a new degree of energy, from the necessity of withdrawing all his thoughts from the past, and fixing them on the present or the future; and his comprehension of the most confused narrative seemed more clear, his orders to the most stupid messenger more precise, than ever they had been in the whole course of his public career.

An assembly of all the deputies from Flanders and Brabant had been appointed for that day; but during the morning a number of persons crowded the great hall in a desultory manner, long before any general meeting of the States took place; and amongst the first that appeared was Maillotin du Bac, with an air which expressed both a knowledge that he had overstepped his authority, and a determination to resist every effort to curb his nearly gratified revenge.

At another moment, Albert Maurice might have alone despised him, and crushed him beneath his feet as a mere worm; but he well knew that great power often trips at a small obstacle. He felt, too, that the height he had reached was a giddy one; and that it might require to stand some time on the dizzy pinnacle of power, in order to acquire that firmness of footing which alone could justify him in despising inferior enemies. His very elevation offended many; and, seeing that the contention must soon commence between himself and the Duke of Gueldres on the one hand, and the Duke of Cleves on the other, he determined to leave the way unencumbered by any minor difficulties. Not that he proposed for a moment to abandon his purpose to-

wards the prisoner he had left the night before; but he resolved to free him by quiet policy, more than by bold and sweeping power.

"Sir Prévôt," he said, as soon as their first salutation had passed, "you did wrong, last night, in placing a sentry within the walls of the municipal prison; and also somewhat harshly, in confining an untried prisoner in one of the lower dungeons. Hear me, sir, to an end," he added, seeing the other about to make some dogged reply: "I have no intention of bringing the matter of your boldness before the council, as I might have done; but the thing must not be repeated. Should any like event arise again, I will take care the magistracy of Ghent shall examine strictly what punishment is to be inflicted on those who have frequently dared to infringe their privileges! Mark me, and remember! for I will not pass it over a second time. Now, then, before the States assemble, take one of my officers and visit the prisoner. See whether he is able to undergo examination to-day; and make me your report."

The Prévôt was very glad to avoid any collision with the eschevins of Ghent, and at the same time to see a fair prospect of his revenge being accomplished; but, as it was far from the wish of Maillotin du Bac that his prisoner should be examined before the States at all, he instantly determined to report him as much too ill to meet the proposed investigation.

At the same time, there was something in the demeanour of the young citizen that surprised him. As men of shrewd but mean minds sometimes are, in their estimation of nobler characters, he was generally right in his appreciation of Albert Maurice, and usually perceived the great object that the President was likely to seek in any particular contingency, without, however, at all comprehending the inferior means he would employ to accomplish his purpose. So much the contrary, indeed, that after having judged correctly of the ultimate design, he would often become puzzled and doubtful in regard to the accuracy of his judgment even on that point, because the course pursued by the young citizen was almost always totally different from the method which he himself would have followed in order to arrive at the same object, and totally opposed to all the axioms of his own meaner policy.

Thus, in the present instance, he had sought the town-hall so early, under the perfect conviction that the President of Ghent would attempt to liberate the man who had before given him his

freedom; believing, at the same time, that the consciousness of such a purpose would cause the aspiring citizen to avoid the subject, or to speak darkly upon his own views. But the bold and proud manner in which Albert Maurice rebuked his assumption of power in the town prison, and spoke of the immediate examination of the prisoner, shook his conviction, and almost made him believe that the same stern and uncompromising policy, which had been pursued towards Hugonet and Imbercourt, would be followed throughout, without regard to any other feeling than selfish ambition.

The scenes which he soon witnessed tended to confirm this opinion; and led him, however falsely, to believe that Albert Maurice forgot every gentler and nobler feeling, every generous tie and private affection, in the overpowering impulse of an aspiring heart. Scarcely had the order proceeded from the lips of the young citizen to inspect the condition of the prisoner, ere two or three members of the States entered the hall. Several others followed within a very short interval; and as soon as Albert Maurice perceived that a sufficient number were assembled to justify the discussion of important matters, he declared the appointed hour fully arrived, called them to consultation, and at once boldly proposed that a decree of banishment—drawn up in the name of the States General of Flanders, though not ten members of that body were present, and those wholly devoted to his own views—should be issued against the Lord of Ravestein and the Dowager Duchess of Burgundy, as parties to the plot for subjecting the country to the sway of France.

So bold a measure was not, of course, without an object of deep moment to him who proposed it; but, when it is remembered, that Ravestein and Margaret of York were the only influential members of what was called in Ghent the French party, who now remained with the Princess, his motives will be clear enough; for it was that party only which Albert Maurice feared. The Duke of Gueldres, though dangerous from the popularity he had suddenly acquired, the young citizen thought himself strong enough to overthrow when he pleased, supported, as he was sure of being in such a case, by the Duke of Cleves, and by the manifest abhorrence which the Princess displayed towards the brutal aspirant to her hand; and the Duke of Cleves himself, the President felt sure, was too weak to succeed without his aid. Thus the French party was the only obstacle to his views

that he really dreaded; but still, the measure he counselled was too bold to pass without some debate.

It was carried, however, at length, before any one arrived who had sufficient influence to oppose it with vigour; and the order for the instant removal of the Dowager Duchess and the Lord of Ravestein was sent at once to the palace, enforced by a large body of the burgher guard.

Gradually the assembly increased, till about forty persons were gathered round the council table, while a number of others, unentitled to a seat amongst the deliberative body, filled the vacant places of the hall, by the favour of the President's adherents. He himself was, perhaps, not unaware that a multitude of voices, ready to applaud his words, were collected around him; for the noblest,—ay, and the proudest heart will bend servilely to the senseless shout it despises, when once it has bound itself as a serf in the golden collar of ambition. At length, after casting his eye around, to see who were the members of the States assembled, Albert Maurice rose to speak; but, as he did so, the trampling of horse coming at a rapid rate, and loud shouts of "Long live the Duke of Gueldres! Health to the noble Duke and the fair Princess! Long life to Ghent and the Duke of Gueldres!" were heard rising from the square below; and the young citizen again sat down, with a contracted brow and quivering lip.

In a few moments the Duke of Gueldres entered the hall, and took his seat on the right of the President, who knew the informal constitution of their whole assembly too well, to object to that noble's intrusion on their councils. But the young citizen rose again immediately himself, and at once addressed the States, as they termed themselves, in a speech full of fire and energy. He pointed out that the time was now come, when active and combined exertion throughout the whole land was necessary to save it from the usurpation of France—when not only the safety, but the very existence of the country required the energy of every individual to be employed, without a moment's delay, for the benefit of the whole; and he touched eloquently upon the necessity of laying aside all private jealousies, disputes, and feuds, in order to concentrate all efforts to check the rapid progress of the French monarch. Of many dangers, he said, it was of course necessary to meet that which was most imminent, and no one would doubt for a moment that the usurping and successful arms

of France presented the peril they had most to dread. Severe measures had been pursued, he said, to show the timid and the traitor that they could not betray their country with impunity; and it became the States of Flanders and Brabant, even as a consequence of many of their late acts, to prove to their countrymen that they could and would protect the honest and the patriotic, as well as punish the guilty and the disloyal. It was time, he added, to lay aside all differences of opinion, to forget individual interests and passions, to cast away every thought but patriotism, and calling forth the whole intelligence and the whole strength of the state, to join heart and hand, and mind and energy, in defence of their violated rights and their insulted country.

He spoke with the most powerful oratory, and he spoke true; but he did not remember that the oil of smooth words will never allay the raging waves of faction, even though the storm of anarchy threaten to wreck the state itself. Had he looked into his own heart, indeed, and seen that, though he was now anxious to repel the common enemy, yet it was but in order to seize one quiet moment to overthrow his rivals, he would have learned the secret of every bosom around him, and found that selfish ambition was the whole.

In the midst of his speech, however, while, in the very vehemence of declamation, he was inveighing against France, and was about to proceed, from the general terms which he had been using, to a clear and minute view of the state of the land, and the measures immediately necessary for its defence, one of the deputies from some inferior town, who believed the moment for distinguishing his own small knowledge and talents was arrived, rose, and boldly cut across the President's speech, exclaiming, "Perhaps the noble President does not know the unhappy news——"

"I know all!" thundered Albert Maurice, his eyes lightening with indignation at the interruption. "God of Heaven! wherefore do I hold the station that I do, if it be not to learn, and know, and investigate all that may concern the interest of the state? Do I not know that Arras has fallen? that Tournay is now in the hands of the enemy? that Hesdin, and Boulogne, and Bethune are taken? that Oudard has been murdered? that Descordes is false? that Vergy lies in chains? Do I not know that the duchy of Burgundy is invaded; that Franche-compté is overrun; and that the troops of Louis are advancing to the gates

of Ghent? What is it that I do not know, that any one should dare to interrupt me? Let me tell the deputy who has just sat down, that, if he had all the miserable catalogue of the woes and dangers of his country, from the first infraction of her frontiers, to the last base, or mean, or murderous act of her great enemy, so much by heart as I have, he would turn every thought of his mind to find means of meeting the perils that menace us, rather than break through the order of this assembly by speaking before he has heard."

The vehemence with which the young citizen spoke, the picture of overwhelming misfortunes which he displayed, and the deep tone of patriotic anxiety which his words breathed forth, combined to make his hearers forget the angry bitterness with which he rebuked one of their members, and each turned and gazed, with an expression of terror, in the faces of the others, as the President counted over the rapid losses and misfortunes of their country.

Albert Maurice paused, and Ganay, who was present, remarked, without rising, "Something must be immediately done to remedy all this. Or, doubtless," he added, not unwilling to bring about some imputation of blame upon Albert Maurice for neglect, though unwilling to utter one word of blame himself, "or, doubtless, our noble President has already, with his usual activity, prepared some means of meeting all these difficulties."

"I have!" replied Albert Maurice, sternly; and as he did so, a slight curl of the lip conveyed to the druggist a suspicion that his purpose had been understood. "I have! The difficulty can only be met, the enemy can only be opposed in arms, and the means have been prepared. Seven thousand men have been raised and trained in Ghent, as you all know. Three thousand men are ready to march in the villages round about. Before noon, five thousand more will be in the city from Ypres, and, ere night, five thousand more will have arrived from Bruges; while Brabant and the other provinces are preparing an army of forty thousand men besides. Our power is thus already sufficient to keep the towns of Flanders against the King of France, while forces are marching up to our aid, which will soon enable us to expel him from our land for ever. Provisions for forty days have been prepared, and a magazine of arms is already established at Oudenarde, which is garrisoned by a sufficient force to ensure it from capture. We have still a line

of fortified places, which we can soon render secure; and having done so, we can bid the tyrant either retire from our borders, or let his soldiers rot in the field till we reap them with the sword, instead of that harvest which they have mowed ere it was ripe."

A loud and long burst of applause followed this recapitulation of the means which, by the most extraordinary activity, he had collected in so short a space of time to repel the arms of France; and, satisfied with the impression that he had made, Albert Maurice sat down, in order to allow one of the deputies from Ypres to propose a plan of action, which had been previously laid out between them, for the employment of the forces thus raised to the general advantage of Flanders. The worthy burgher, however, though a man of sense, and some military skill, having served during a considerable time with the people of his commune under the Duke Philip, was always an unwilling speaker, and paused for a moment to collect his ideas after the President had sat down.

The Duke of Gueldres instantly seized the occasion, and, anxious to gain the command of the army, proposed to lead it himself against the suburbs of Tournay, together with five hundred men-at-arms which he had raised since his liberation. "The very appearance of such a force in the field," he said, "and led on to some rapid and brilliant expedition, would make Louis XI., who had been well called *Le Roi Couard*, pause and hesitate, while fresh reinforcements might come up to swell the army of Flanders, and enable it either to risk a general battle, or attempt the re-capture of the towns which had been taken."

To this proposal Albert Maurice strongly objected, and declared that, instead of encountering any further risk than that inevitable in leading a raw and unexperienced army through a difficult country, they ought to make it their chief object to strengthen the garrisons of all the many fortified towns they still possessed, but more especially to throw a considerable force into Lille and Douai, which still held out for the Princess, and were plentifully supplied with provisions, but whose respective garrisons were too small to retard the progress of Louis for three days, whenever he should lead his armies against them. In support of this opinion, he showed that troops hastily levied, and unaccustomed to warfare, were much more likely to serve well when defended by stone walls, and commanded by experienced officers, than in the open field against a veteran army.

He showed, also, that Tournay itself was not likely long to hold out for France, if Lille and Douai were properly garrisoned with numbers sufficient to sweep the whole neighbouring country of provisions; and he ended by calling upon the States not to be dazzled by the apparent ease of the enterprise proposed by the Duke of Gueldres, for he could assure them that it was the best maxim, both in tactics and policy, never to believe anything impossible, but never to fancy anything easy.

The countenance of the Duke of Gueldres flushed with wrath, to hear himself so boldly opposed by a simple citizen of Ghent, and he was about to reply with hasty vehemence, which would infallibly have ruined all his own designs, had not Ganay started up, and, with all the smooth and plausible art of which he was master, sketched out a plan, which, while it seemed to coincide with that of Albert Maurice, rendered it nearly nugatory, and, at the same time, coincided exactly with that of the Duke of Gueldres.

"The infinite wisdom and skill," he said, "which have been displayed, under all circumstances, by our noble President, should make us receive his opinion with reverence and respect, even were it not evidently founded in knowledge and experience. There can be no doubt, however, in the minds of any one here present, that the preservation of Lille and Douai is absolutely necessary for the security of Flanders, and may also greatly tend to facilitate the very objects proposed by the noble Duke of Gueldres. But the two plans are by no means incompatible. Neither Lille nor Douai can admit of a garrison of more than two thousand men in addition to that with which they are at present furnished. Twelve or thirteen thousand men will be quite sufficient to enable the noble Duke to make his attempt upon Tournay. Let then the President himself, whose military skill we all witnessed, when he served with the men of Ghent under the late Duke Charles, some five or six years ago,—let him then lead five thousand men to the aid of Lille and Douai; and, having thrown what force into those places he may find necessary, return with the rest to Ghent; while, in the meantime, the Duke marches forth against Tournay with the rest of the troops which we can spare from the defence of this city."

The feelings which this speech excited in the mind of Albert Maurice were of a very mixed and intricate nature. By this time, from many of those slight and accidental indications by

which a skilful observer may read the changes of the human heart, the young burgher had learned that Ganay was no longer the zealous friend he had been, and he felt, rather than remarked, that, with that dark and subtle being there could be no medium between active support and deadly opposition, circumstanced as they were and had been. With this conviction impressed upon his mind, perhaps he might see, or at least suspect, that one object in the proposal of the druggist was to obtain his absence from the city. He might see, too, that the command of a large portion of the army given to the Duke of Gueldres, whose military abilities were well known, would throw immense power into the hands of that prince, becoming already too powerful; and he likewise knew the general dangers attendant upon the absence of a political leader too well, not to dread the consequences of his own departure from Ghent at a moment so critical.

Nevertheless, one of his chief weaknesses was the ambition of military renown; and that ambition had received an impulse which it had never known before, since he had dared to raise his hopes to a princess descended from a race of heroes. He felt, too, within himself, great powers of the kind immediately required, and he trusted that, by the exertion of that energetic activity which characterized all his movements, he should be enabled to accomplish his enterprise,—to add, perhaps, some brilliant exploits to all that he had already performed, and to return to Ghent before any great advantage could be taken of his absence by his enemies.

An immediate reply, however, was necessary, and long discussions ensued, in the course of which Albert Maurice did not absolutely oppose the scheme of Ganay; yet there were in the details so many nice and delicate points to be determined, that much angry and vehement dispute took place, in which the violent and overbearing temper of the Duke of Gueldres more than once broke forth, and was repressed by the young citizen, in his capacity of President of the States, with a stern severity, that left them both, with flushed cheeks and frowning brows, gazing upon each other when the meeting of the States broke up.

By this time all was determined. Albert Maurice had accepted the command, with the understanding that it was totally distinct and independent of the one conferred upon the Duke of Gueldres, that the troops were solely under his own orders,

and that the moment he had performed the specific task he undertook, he was at liberty to return to Ghent. All this had been conceded. The populace quitted the hall, and the deputies, one by one, took their leave and retired.

The Duke of Gueldres was among the last that left the apartment, and it was with a slow step he descended the stairs nearly to the bottom, biting his lip with ill-repressed passion at the contradiction he had met with, and at the little reverence that the President of Ghent had shown either to his opinions or to his rank. His meditations did not serve to cool him; on the contrary, at every step the words which had been addressed to him, and the scene in which they had been spoken, recurred with more and more bitterness to his mind; and when he had reached the last step but two, passion, as it often did with him, got the better of all command, and stamping on the ground with his foot, as he remembered the contemptuous curl of the young citizen's lip, he turned, and mounting the stairs with wide strides, once more entered the hall.

Albert Maurice was standing alone at the head of the table, with a countenance of deep melancholy, from which every expression of anger and scorn was now totally banished. He raised his eyes as the Duke entered, and gazed upon him with surprise, as advancing close to him, with flashing eyes and a burning cheek, that rude prince exclaimed, "You have dared, sir,—villain and slave as you are, base mechanical hind, bred and born amongst looms and shuttles,—you have dared to treat with disrespect a noble of the land, and, by Heaven! you shall some day pay for it. Were you not as the dirt beneath my feet, and would not your vile blood sully my sword to shed it, I would save the hangman the pains he may some day have, and punish you where you stand."

"Know, Duke of Gueldres," replied Albert Maurice, with calm sternness,—though in other days he might have laughed at the intemperate insolence of his adversary,—"Know, Duke of Gueldres, that were there anything in the empty assumption of blood, mine is descended from as pure a stock as your own, though one of my ancestors wisely and nobly chose to embrace an honourable trade, rather than follow the example of such as you and yours, and live by rapine, plunder, oppression, and wrong. Advance not your hand towards me, Sir Duke, for remember that insult levels all distinctions; and that I, too, wear

a sword, which I should not scruple to dye in nobler blood than that of the Duke of Gueldres, if he laid but a finger upon me."

"Out, slave!" cried the Duke; "I will take thy boasted descent on credit, were it but to punish thine insolence!" and striking the young citizen a violent blow on the breast, he threw back his mantle and drew his sword.

Albert Maurice was not slack to meet him, and his sword was also in his hand, when a number of the citizens who had heard, through the open doors, the high words which had lately passed, ran in and beat up their weapons. The Duke of Gueldres glared round him for a moment in vain fury, then thrust back his sword into its scabbard, and shaking his clenched hand towards the young citizen, exclaimed, "When next we meet!" and, turning on his heel, left the apartment.

Albert Maurice sheathed his weapon also, and only commenting on what had passed by a contemptuous smile, resumed his look of grave thought, and proceeded calmly to transact the business of his station.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Duke of Gueldres, however, was still to enjoy a triumph before he returned to his dwelling, which, could he have seen into the heart of his rival, would have fully compensated all the pain which his anger had inflicted on himself. Albert Maurice was left alone; but there was a shout in the market-place without, which rang painfully on his ears, as he turned from the great hall; for he could not avoid hearing the loud voice of the multitude, cheering the Duke of Gueldres as he mounted his horse.

The sounds were distinct enough; and to him bitter enough, also! They were "Long live the Duke of Gueldres and the Princess! Gueldres and Burgundy for ever! We will give her to whom we like! She shall marry the good Duke! Long life to the noble Duke of Gueldres!" and though, as that prince rode on, the words were no longer to be distinguished, the cries still continued, and the fancy of the young citizen furnished each

brawling shout with articulate sounds of the character most inimical to his own peace.

"Ere I go," he thought,—"ere I go, I will see her myself; and assure myself of her feelings before I quit the city. Then, if I find that she hates him, as I believe—that she looks upon him as the wolf he really is, I will take sufficient means to guard her from his importunities during my absence."

The determination was no sooner formed than he prepared to execute it; and, while he despatched a messenger to the palace to demand an audience of the Princess previous to his departure, which was fixed for the next day, he gave a multitude of necessary orders, and as soon as his horse was ready, set out himself to seek an interview, which the consciousness of having brought about the death of Mary's counsellors, and the banishment of her friends, made him dread even while he courted it.

But, as those who are young in deceit generally do, he forgot, for the time, that the dark secrets of his heart were confined to his own bosom; and that the policy he had pursued, and the bold ambition that prompted it, were unknown to her who had most suffered by it. In truth, the feelings of Mary were very different from those which he had anticipated. The broad and simple facts only had reached her ear. She knew that the young citizen had taken no part in the trial or the judgment of Imbercourt, and that he had not even been present at his execution. The order for the immediate removal of the Duchess Dowager and Ravestein, also, had been issued in the name of the States: and perfectly unconscious of the wild hopes and ambitious dreams of Albert Maurice, she believed that if he had at all mingled in those proceedings, it was but most unwillingly, and from a strong, though mistaken impression of duty and patriotism. Deprived, too, of the counsellors in whom she had always most trusted, and of the friends whom she had most loved, the unhappy girl felt inclined to cling to any one who seemed disposed to treat her with kindness and tenderness; and the only one who now remained was Albert Maurice. He had always been gentle; he had always seemed to advocate her interest; he had never asked her for gift, or honour, or dignity; and even his very animosity towards Imbercourt and the Chancellor, had first arisen in the support which he gave to the Princess, in her reluctant struggles against the hard and painful policy her ministers had dictated. The dignity of his demeanour, the high

qualities of his mind, the independence of his character, and the apparent disinterestedness of his conduct, had gained her esteem; and the respectful gentleness of his manners towards herself, as well as his constant and zealous advocacy, in the council, of the line of policy dictated by her wishes as a woman, had won her gratitude and her confidence.

A gleam of pleasure brightened the gloom around her when she heard that he was coming; and, in order at once to attach him more strongly to her interests, to express her thanks for his supposed services, and to detach him totally from the burgher faction, whose influence had already worked so much evil, she directed one of the officers of the palace to draw up, immediately, letters of nobility in favour of the young citizen, and to bring them to her with all speed. Gentle by nature and by habit, the only arms which Mary ever employed against her rebellious subjects were favours and mildness, and she fondly fancied, that, in this step towards Albert Maurice, she had devised a deep stroke of policy. The secretary's task was almost completed when Albert Maurice arrived; and the evident pleasure with which Mary received him, in the midst of all her griefs, extinguished for the time remorse and apprehension in the blaze of hope and joy, and once more nerved him for the bold career of ambition in which he had started against such fearful odds.

The Princess was pale and shaken with all the agitation, terror, and grief of the day before; but the light that shone up in her eyes, and the smile which played about her lips as he approached, made her appear a thousand times more lovely in the eyes of the young burgher than she would have seemed in all the pride of state, security, and happiness. In the unconscious simplicity of her heart, too, all her words gave encouragement to feelings that she little dreamed of; and when, on the announcement of his approaching departure, she pressed him to stay, and to abandon his design; when she assured him that he was the only one in whom she could now trust, since her faithful servants had been put to death and her kindred had been banished, and beseeched him not to leave her without a counsellor, or without a friend, Albert Maurice, knowing the passions that animated his own bosom, could not but hope that in some degree she saw them too; and—while habitual respect cast a deep reverence over all his words and actions, which served to deceive her as to his feelings,—his love and his ambition caught a new fire from

the confiding esteem she expressed towards him. He assured her that in six days he would be once more in Ghent; and he hoped, he said, to lay some laurels at her feet. In the meantime, he added, it might be necessary to think of her security against all intrusion.

"Oh, for the love of Heaven, provide for that!" exclaimed the Princess; "I fear that base, that dreadful Duke of Gueldres. Even the shelter of my own apartments is no security against him; and his influence with the people, they tell me, is becoming fearfully great. Speak, Margaret," she added, turning to one of her attendants, "what was it you heard the people crying but now?"

"Fear not, your Grace," replied Albert Maurice, without waiting to hear from the Princess's lady a repetition of words which had already made his blood boil. "Fear not, your Grace! The career of the Duke of Gueldres draws towards its end! If I judge rightly, his own ambition will be a stumbling-block sufficient to bring his speedy overthrow. But if not—sooner than you should suffer from his insolent daring, he shall find that Albert Maurice does not wear a sword in vain."

"Oh, use it not against him, sir," replied the Princess; "there may be other ways of ridding the city of his presence. Too much blood has been shed already—Nay, do not look sad, Lord President. I know that it was without your will. I know that you were not even present. But while you are absent from the city,—if your absence be unavoidable,—I beseech you to take measures to guard me against his intrusion. When you return," she added, with a deep crimson blush, which rose from feelings that would have damned all the young citizen's presumptuous hopes for ever, could he have divined them; "when you return, I would fain speak with you, on taking such measures for the defence of the state as may obtain for it permanent security. A woman's hand, I see, cannot hold the reins of such a land as that, which I am unhappily called to govern; and it is time for me to yield them to some one who can better guide the state than I can. But more of this hereafter. We will not speak more now."

The heart of the young citizen throbbed as if it would have burst,—but it throbbed with joy; and probably he might have replied, notwithstanding the prohibition of the Princess, in such a manner as would have ended the delusion of both; but, at that

moment, according to the orders he had received, the secretary of the chancery of Burgundy brought in the letters-patent, which he had been drawing up in haste.

The Princess presented them to him for whom they were destined with her own hand, leaving him at liberty to make them public, or to preserve them unemployed till such time as he should think fit: and while she gave them, she added her thanks for his obedience to the wishes she had expressed when last they met. Though the subject was too painful for the Princess even to mention the name of the two faithful servants she had lost, yet Albert Maurice felt that she alluded to her petitions in their behalf. For a single instant he thought she spoke in irony, and his cheek turned red and pale by turns; but a moment's reflection called to his mind the simple, candid character of her who spoke, and what she had before said on the same subject; and he saw that she deceived herself in regard to the part he had taken. There was a natural rectitude in his heart which might have made him, at any risk, avow boldly his approval of, if not his participation in, the bloodshed which had been committed—had the love of Mary of Burgundy not been at stake. But he who knew not what fear is, under other circumstances, had learned to become as timid as a child in her presence; and though, while kneeling to kiss her hand in thanks for the honour she had just conferred, his whole frame trembled both with the agitation of deep love, and the knowledge that he was acting a deceitful part, yet he found it impossible to utter those words which he well knew would have pronounced his own condemnation to the ears of Mary of Burgundy.

The sensation, however, oppressed him; and, after hurried and somewhat incoherent thanks, he took his leave and retired, feeling that he had made another step in the crooked and degrading path of policy.

The rest of the day was consumed in preparations for his departure early the next morning, and in precautions against the influence of his enemies in Ghent. Men may make use of knaves and hypocrites, in order to rise, but they must still have recourse to the honest and the true, when they would give permanence to their authority. Thus, from the council which Albert Maurice now called to his aid, Ganay was excluded, as well as all the fiercer and more subtle spirits, which had hitherto been so busy in the affairs of Ghent; while honest Martin Fruse, and seven

other citizens like himself, who, though not without their weaknesses and their follies, possessed at heart a fund of honesty of intent and plain common sense, were summoned by the young citizen to a private conference, for the purpose of taking such measures as would secure the peace and tranquillity of the city, and the stability of the order of things established, during his temporary absence.

He felt it difficult, indeed, to explain to them all the evils that were to be guarded against, all the dangers that he foresaw, and all the apprehensions that he entertained, especially in regard to the druggist Ganay. To have done so fully, would have been to have exposed all the darker and more dangerous secrets of his own bosom, and to have given a picture of himself, of the means he had employed, and of the deeds into which he had been betrayed, which he was unwilling to display to any human being. Thus it was not without much circumlocution that he could find words to convey his immediate views to the honest men by whom he was surrounded, and yet keep to those general terms which might not expose himself.

Martin Fruse, however, whose love for his nephew was paramount in his bosom, greatly relieved the task; for—with a sort of intuitive feeling, that there were many things which Albert Maurice would wish to keep concealed, and from a desire of sparing him as much as possible—he passed as rapidly as his intellect would permit him to conclusions, skipping as quickly as possible over all explanations regarding preceding facts with a nod or smile of intelligence, which led the other worthy merchants to believe that he was fully acquainted with all the machinery of the events which had taken place. After some hours' consultation, it was arranged that Albert Maurice, deputing his whole municipal authority to his uncle, should entrust the worthy citizen and the other merchants present, to form such a party in the council, as might keep the affairs of the town, if possible, in a completely passive state during his absence. His office in the States General he could not transfer; for though he held the presidency of that body as a privilege connected with its assembling in the city of which he had been constituted chief magistrate, yet that privilege could not be deputed to another; and the States—if they met at all during his absence—would be presided by the next deputy from the city of Ghent.

The power, however, which he placed in the hands of good

Martin Fruse was anything but insignificant, for Ghent then ruled the States; and it was determined that all measures were to be taken for the security of the city and the repairs of the fortifications; that the purchase of supplies and provisions, and the levying of men, were to go on as usual; but that, upon the proposal of any important movement, on the part of Ghent, a motion for its postponement till the return of the President was immediately to be put, and supported by his friends. The meeting of the States General, too, was to be opposed as much as possible during his absence from Ghent; and as the authority of the municipality was, of course, paramount in their own city, it seemed probable that his friends would be able to exert great influence in this respect. Any pretensions which the Duke of Gueldres might put forward to the hand of the Princess were to be strenuously opposed in the council; and Martin Fruse, and the burgher guard, were to give her every support and protection, in case she might require it. Anxious, too, for the safety of Hugh of Gueldres, Albert Maurice took care that a strong force should be stationed at the town prison, and that the merchants should be prepared to put an instant negative upon any proposal for bringing the prisoner to trial during his absence.

When all these arrangements were concluded, the next care of the young citizen was to select such bands from amongst both the new and old levies of the city, as were most likely to ensure him success in the enterprises which he was about to execute; and this being done, and all his further preparations completed, he proceeded, once more, to visit the Vert Gallant of Hannut in the chamber to which he had now been removed. The young cavalier lay in a deep, sweet sleep, from which even the opening of the door and the approach of Albert Maurice did not wake him; and the President gazed for a moment or two on his face—as he lay so calm and tranquil, within the walls of a prison, suffering from injuries, and exposed to constant danger—with a feeling of envy and regret, which, perhaps, few can appreciate fully, who have not felt the sharp tooth of remorse begin its sleepless gnawing on the heart.

He would not have disturbed such slumbers for the world; and, withdrawing again with a noiseless step, he retired to his own chamber, and cast himself down upon his bed, to snatch, at least, that heated and disturbed sleep, which was all the repose that he was ever more to know on earth.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The clang of trumpets echoing through the streets of Ghent, an hour before daybreak, announced that the body of forces under the command of the young President was about to set out upon its expedition; and as the burghers started from their sleep, and listened to the various sounds that followed,—the trampling of horses, the voices of the officers, and the dull measured tread of marching men,—not unfrequently did a feeling of pride rise in their bosoms from that universal principle—"the extension of the idea of self;" as each one felt that the army thus on its march was, in some degree, his own, as part and parcel of the city of Ghent.

To the ears of none in the whole town, however, did the sounds come more pleasantly than to those of the druggist Ganay, who had felt, within the last two days, a sort of thirst to see the back of him he had once loved, turned upon the city; for, though—with that degree of pride in his cunning, which artful men often possess—he did not usually apprehend that his wit would fail in a struggle with that of any other being; yet there was something in the unaccountable knowledge of foregone facts which Albert Maurice had displayed, that made him entertain a vague fear of the young citizen, and rendered him unwilling to venture any very bold stroke till Ghent was free from his presence.

The first sound of the trumpet fell upon his ear as he sat watching the bed of the wounded Lord of Neufchâtel, into whose sick chamber he had obtruded himself with an officious zeal, which might have been resented by the noble's attendants, had he not, by quiet and soothing attentions, rendered himself useful, and his presence pleasing to the invalid himself, while a long attendance on a sick and fretful old man, had cooled and wearied those who were at first most active in his service. A restless and feverish night had passed away; and, as morning came, the ancient Seneschal of Burgundy showed some inclination to fall asleep; but the first braying of the trumpets roused him; and he eagerly demanded what those sounds meant. The druggist explained the cause at once; and the enfeebled warrior shook his head with a melancholy air, as he heard the call to horse sounded again, without being able to raise a limb from his couch.

"'Twas not so when first you knew me, Master Ganay?" he said; and then—while one sound succeeded another, and squadron after squadron marched forth through the streets—he continued to murmur a number of low and somewhat incoherent sentences, between the delirium of feverish irritation and the drowsiness of exhaustion. At length, as a faint bluish light began to gleam into the chamber from the dawning of the morning, the last horseman passed before the gates of the court-yard, and all in Ghent resumed its former stillness.

The old man would then have addressed himself to sleep again; but Ganay now recalled his mind to the subject of his brighter days, with an extraordinary degree of pertinacity. "Nay, nay, my noble lord," he said, returning to the topic of their early acquaintance; "when first I saw your lordship, you would little have suffered an army to march, while you lay still in bed."

"Not I—not I, indeed!" replied the Lord of Neufchâtel. "But what can one do?"

"Alack, nothing now," answered the druggist; "but think that you never flinched while you could keep the saddle. You were as eager a rider in those days as ever I met—ay! and somewhat hasty withal."

"Ah! my good Ganay, are you there now?" said the old lord. "Have you not forgot that yet? Well, man, I did you wrong; but have I not tried to make atonement? I did you wrong, I do believe from my soul."

"Believe, my lord!" cried Ganay; "are you not sure? Are not the very papers you possess convincing enough of my innocence?"

"Well, well, perhaps they are," replied the old man, somewhat impatiently.

"Perhaps they are!" exclaimed the other. "Nay, surely they are. But let me fetch and read them to your lordship—where can I find them?"

"They are in the Venice cabinet, I think," answered the Lord of Neufchâtel; "but never mind them—never mind them! I tell thee I am convinced—what need of more? I would fain sleep now, if the accursed itching of this thrust in my shoulder would let me. Call the boy with his rote, good Ganay! he often puts me to sleep by playing on his instrument—or the man that tells stories: he is better still. I never fail to grow drowsy as soon as he begins, and to snore before he has half done."

"Take but a cup of this elixir, my lord," answered the druggist. "Mind you not, how it refreshed you yesterday morning?"

"Surely!" cried the old lord, in a peevish tone. "Have you any more? Why did you not give it me sooner? How could you see me suffer so all night, and not give me that which alone eases me?"

"Because, if used too often, it loses its effect," replied the druggist.

"Give it me—give it me now, then!" cried the invalid, impatiently. "When would you give a man medicine, but when he is ill and in pain? Spare not, man,—let the dose be full. Thou shalt be well paid for thy drugs."

Ganay took up a cup from the table, and nearly filled it with a dark-coloured liquid from a phial which he drew out of his bosom. He then gave it to the old noble, who drank off the contents at once, while the druggist gazed on him with an eye which seemed almost starting from its socket, so intense was the look of eager interest with which he regarded him.

"Are you sure it is the same?" said the Lord of Neufchâtel, returning the cup,—"it tastes differently;—it is bitterer, and has a faint taste as of earth. It is—it is—not so——"

But, as he spoke, the lids of his eyes fell—he opened them drowsily once or twice—added a few more almost inarticulate words, and then sunk back upon his pillow. Ganay looked at him intently for two or three minutes; then stole out of the room; and, descending with a quiet step to the hall, he woke his own serving-boy, who was sitting by the fire—"Hie thee to the Prévôt," he whispered; "bid him hither instantly!"

"Who goes there?" cried the servant on watch, who had been asleep also, but was now wakened by the boy opening the door,—"Who goes there?"

"Only my boy," answered Ganay, "going for some drugs against my good lord wakes—I would have healed him sooner than all the leeches in the town, had I but tried it before; but, of course, I could not meddle till he dismissed the surgeon in such wrath."

"How goes he now, Master Ganay?" demanded the man.

"Better, I hope!" replied the druggist, "but he has had a fearful night. He now sleeps, and I think it is a crisis. If he wake better, he will do well. If not, he dies."

"God forefend!" cried the man.

Ganay echoed loudly the wish, and retired once more to the sick man's chamber.

Entering with stealthy steps, he approached the bed, and gazed upon him that it contained. A slight stream of dark fluid had flowed from his mouth, and stained his pillow; and Ganay, as he remarked this appearance, muttered, "The stomach has rejected it! He must take more. To leave it half done, were worse than all! Here, my lord!" he added, aloud, shaking him by the arm—"Here! take a little more of the same blessed elixir!"

But the old man made no answer, except by a long deep-drawn sigh; and Ganay, adding, "He has had enough," sat down, and turning his face from the lamp, continued gazing for some minutes upon the couch. From time to time, as he sat and looked, a few muttered words would escape his lips; and often he would turn and listen for the sounds in the street, as if impatient for the coming of some one from without.

"The Venice cabinet!" he muttered, "that stands in the small arras chamber by the saloon!—Could one reach it, now, unperceived! But no. 'Tis better to wait till Du Bac arrives—Some of the varlets might catch me, and all were ruined—Better wait till he comes—He is very tedious, though—It works but slowly! He has had hardly enough—What can be done? He cannot take any more!—That is a long drawn sigh,—it should be the last—A little help were not amiss, though!" and so saying, he pressed his hand heavily on the chest of the old Lord of Neufchâtel.

It rose once slightly against the weight; but death and life were by this time so nearly balanced in his frame, that it rose but once, and then all was quiet. Still Ganay continued the pressure with his whole force, till suddenly the eyes opened, and the jaw dropped; and the murderer instinctively started back, fancying that his victim was awaking from his slumber. But he instantly perceived that what he saw was but the sign of a longer and more profound sleep having taken the old man to repose for ever; and, after one more glance to satisfy himself that no means of resuscitation could prove available, he loudly called upon the servants and attendants to give him help, for that their lord was dying. It was some time before he made them hear; for the illness of the old noble, as we have before said, had been long and tedious, and kindness had been wearied, and attention worn out. When they did come, therefore, the druggist had some excuse to rate them severely for inattention and sloth. He

affected to try many means of recalling the dead to life again, and proposed to send for skilful leeches, as soon as he heard the voice of Maillotin du Bac in the hall below.

That officer now came boldly in, and, stopping all other proceedings, demanded whether any relation of the dead lord were in the house. The answer, as he knew it must be, was in the negative; for—as the servants replied—all his connexions were in the far parts of Burgundy. "Well, then," cried the Prévôt,—"it becomes me, though not exactly the proper officer, to seal up all the doors and effects of the deceased, till such time as account can be taken.—You, my men," he continued, to the archers of the band that followed him, "gather all these worthy servants and varlets together in the great hall, and see that no one stirs a step, till I have asked them a question or two. You, Master Ganay, being one of the magistrates of the town, had better come with me, to bear witness that I seal all things fairly. You, my good lieutenant, bring me some wax and a chafing dish, and then return to the hall, to guard these worthy fellows till I come."

The domestic attendants of the old lord, amongst whom were several of his ancient military retainers, grumbled not a little at this arrangement, and might have shown somewhat more stubborn resistance, had not the force brought by the Prévôt overmatched them in numbers as well as in preparations. One of them, however, whispered to a boy who was amongst them, to slip out and warn the other retainers in the lodging over the way; the house, or rather houses, of the deceased noble, extending, as was not uncommon in those times, to both sides of the street. With this intimation to the boy, and one or two loud oaths, which the Prévôt would not hear, the servants were removed, and the two accomplices stood together in the dead man's chamber alone. Such sights were too familiar to Maillotin du Bac, to cause even the slightest feeling of awe to cross his bosom, as he gazed on the face of the corpse; and after looking at it for a moment in silence, he turned to the druggist with a well satisfied smile, but without farther comment.

"Let us make haste!" cried Ganay,—"the papers are in the Venice cabinet, in the little arras chamber by the saloon."

"Wait for the wax! Wait for the wax, man!" replied the Prévôt; "there is plenty of time. Let us do things orderly. You, seek for the keys in the meantime. They are in that cup-

board, probably. Where is its own key? But never mind,—I will put back the lock with my dagger."

This was soon accomplished, and the open door exposed, as the Prévôt had expected, several large bunches of keys, and a leathern bag, which bore all the marks of being swelled out with coined pieces of some kind. The druggist seized upon the keys, and carefully concealed them on his person; but the Prévôt dipped his hand zealously into the heart of the leathern bag,—drawing it forth, and then plunging it deep into his own bosom, without at all examining what his fist contained. After two or three such dives down into the pouch, which grew somewhat lank and wrinkled under its intercourse with the Prévôt's hand, he raised it, as if to see how much it still contained, murmuring —"We must leave some!"

An approaching step now caused him to replace it hastily, and close the door; and, as soon as the lieutenant brought him the wax and chafing dish he had been despatched to seek, Maillotin du Bac proceeded to secure that cupboard first, using the hilt of his dagger as a seal.

The inferior officer was speedily sent away; and the Prévôt instantly turned to his companion, saying, "Now to the Venice cabinet, if you will. You know the way better than I—lead on."

"This way, then! this way!" answered the druggist, "we will go by the back passage;" and opening another door, he hurried on through several corridors, till they entered what had been the great saloon of the hotel. They paused not to feel, and still less to comment on the gloomy aspect which association gives to a festive chamber, the lord of which is just gone down to the gloomy dust: but crossing it as fast as possible, they entered a small room beyond, which was hung all round with rich arras tapestry, and which, besides some settles and a table, contained a large black cabinet of the kind which was at that time imported from Venice.

The druggist approached it eagerly; and looking at the lock, and then at the keys in his hand, after some difficulty chose one, and applied it to the keyhole. What was his surprise, however, to find that the cabinet was already open, and that the whole shelves which it contained were covered with books and papers, in a state of terrible confusion.

"Curses on the old sloven!" he cried; "this will take an age to go through."

"Better take all the papers," said the Prévôt, "and leave the trash of books; but at all events make haste!"

"I cannot conceal them all," replied the druggist. "Here! help me to search. They are tied up in a bundle together, with my name on the back."

The Prévôt approached, and aided Ganay busily in his search; and at length the druggist himself caught a sight of the papers, lying far back in the cabinet: "Here they are! Here they are!" he cried; but at that moment—as he was reaching forth his hand to seize them — a powerful grasp was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round with a sudden start, he beheld the countenance of Albert Maurice.

Without giving him time to deliberate, the young citizen drew him forcibly back from the cabinet with his right hand, while he himself laid his left upon the very bundle of papers that Ganay had been about to take. The druggist was struck dumb with surprise, disappointment, and consternation; but Maillotin du Bac, who did not easily lose his presence of mind, exclaimed at once, "What, you here, Sir President! I thought you were miles hence by this time."

"Doubtless you did," replied Albert Maurice, "doubtless you did! What do you here?"

"We seek to discover if there be any testamentary paper," replied the Prévôt, who perceived that the doorway, which opened into the saloon, was full of people, amongst whom he recognised none of his own band.

"And what right have you, sir, to seek for such papers?" demanded the President. "Is it a part of your office? Is it a part of your duty? You seem to consider your functions wonderfully enlarged of late. Advance, Maitre Pierre," he continued, turning to one of the eschevins of the city, who had accompanied him thither. "You will do your duty in sealing up the effects of the Lord of Neufchâtel. As for these papers which I have in my hand, I hold them to be necessary to the state, having seen them before, by the consent of the Lord of Neufchâtel, while awaiting in this chamber of his house, an examination before the council of the Princess on a charge brought against me by yon Prévôt. It is my intention, therefore, to keep them in my possession. But I beseech you, in the first instance, to envelop them carefully, sealing them with your own seal, after which I will be answerable for them to what-

ever person may prove to be the legal heir of the nobleman deceased."

Ganay's face, always pale, became cadaverous, as he heard these words; and both Albert Maurice and the Prévôt believed that the only feeling in his heart, at that moment, was terror. The words he muttered to himself, however, were—"Fool! he has destroyed himself!"—and they might have served to show, had they been overheard, that the predominant passion of his soul—revenge—was still uppermost, and even overbore both consternation and surprise.

The eschevin, according to the desire of the President, sealed up the papers in an envelope, and returned them to him; and Albert Maurice, whose stern eye had turned severely from the countenance of the one culprit to the other, with an expression which made them at first believe that he meditated to exert his authority for their immediate punishment, now once more addressed the magistrate, saying, "I must myself leave you, sir, to pursue this business alone, for it will require hard riding to overtake the troops; but I have every confidence that you will examine this suspicious affair most strictly and carefully. You know how far, according to the laws, such conduct as we have seen to-day is just or unjust, and you will take measures, without fear or favour, to see that justice be not evaded. But you will be pleased especially to cause the body of the deceased nobleman, of which we had but a casual glance just now, to be carefully examined by competent persons, in order to ascertain the cause of his death. My speedy return will prevent the necessity of your employing any means but those of precaution, till we meet again. In the meantime, farewell."

Thus saying, Albert Maurice, without taking any further notice either of Ganay or the Prévôt, quitted the chamber; and, leaving a sufficient number of persons behind to enforce the authority of the eschevin, he proceeded to the court-yard, and, mounting his horse, galloped off.

Things that appear very extraordinary in themselves, are often brought about by the simplest means; and such had been the case in regard to the interruption which Ganay and the Prévôt had met with in the execution of their design. Albert Maurice had been prevented, by some casual business, from setting out himself at the hour he at first proposed, but in order that the troops might not be delayed, he suffered them to begin their

march from Ghent, under their inferior officers, well knowing that, with the number of swift horses he had at his command, he could overtake them before they had advanced many miles. His way lay past the hotel of the Lord of Neufchâtel; and as he was riding hastily on with a few attendants, he saw a boy drop from one of the casements, and run across the street in breathless speed. From some vague suspicion, Albert Maurice stopped him, with inquiries into the cause of his haste; and the boy at once replied, "The old lord is dead, and the prévôt and the druggist have shut all the varlets up in the hall, while they seal up the papers. So they sent me to tell the squires and men-at-arms in the other lodging."

Such tidings, joined to the previous knowledge that he possessed, was quite sufficient for Albert Maurice; and, sending instantly for one of the eschevins who lived close by, he proceeded at once to the hotel, and, with his own followers, the retainers he found on the premises, and those who rapidly came over from the other side of the street, he obliged the Prévôt's guard to quit the place. He then at once turned his steps to the chamber of the dead man, and after a hasty examination of the corpse, which excited still stronger suspicions than those he had before entertained, he led the way silently to the room in which he knew that the papers referring to Ganay were usually kept.

All that ensued we have already seen, and, without pursuing any further the events which took place in Ghent, we shall beg leave to follow the young citizen on his journey.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The transactions of the next few days, though certainly comprising matters of great interest to many of the persons connected with the present history, must be passed over as briefly as possible, because their nature is in a certain sense discordant with the general tenour of the story. This is no tale of battles; unless it be the battle of passions in the human heart; and therefore it is that we give no minute detail of the incidents which befel Albert Maurice in his short but brilliant military career. Suffice

it to say, that by happy combinations, and the strenuous exertion of the great activity which was one of the most conspicuous traits in his character, he had, in the short space of five days, thrown forces into Douai and Lille, and had defeated Le Lude and a body of men-at-arms despatched from Arras to cut off his retreat.

Well aware of the mighty effect of success in blowing up the bubble of popularity, he despatched messenger after messenger to Ghent, bearing tidings of each event as it occurred. Joy and gratulation spread through the city; and the people of Ghent, elated by their novel exploits in arms, laid out in fancy vast plans of conquest and aggrandizement, and began to think themselves invincible in the field. Nor was his military success without effect upon the heart of Albert Maurice himself. It did not, it is true, produce such overweening expectations in his own bosom, as it did in those of his weaker fellow citizens. But it certainly did give him fresh confidence in his own powers, from the very fact of finding good fortune attend him in every effort, however new and unfamiliar to his habits and his mind. It nerved him to dare all, and to struggle against every difficulty; and the combination of constant occupation and repeated triumph drowned, for the time, those feelings of remorse and self-upbraiding, which, day by day, had been acquiring a stronger hold upon his heart. Besides, it communicated to his mind the refreshing consciousness of being energetically employed in the execution of duties totally unmingled with any baser motive in their origin, or any degrading means in their progress. In the actions which he performed during these four days, he felt that for the first time he was really serving his country, that he was winning a purer glory and gaining a nobler name, than faction or intrigue—whatever might be its object, and whatever might be its result—could ever obtain for man; and his heart expanded with a joy long unknown, when at night he summed up the events of the day, and found that another sun had risen and set on deeds which he could dare all the world to scrutinize.

Still the necessity of his immediate return to Ghent was not the less felt; and as soon as ever he had accomplished the great purpose of his expedition, he commenced his march homewards, and pursued it with as much rapidity as possible.

His force was, by this time, reduced to a thousand horse, from the various reinforcements he had thrown into the frontier towns; but nevertheless, confident of his own powers, in return-

ing to Ghent he took a road which passed in the immediate neighbourhood of Tournay, although various bands detached from the garrison of that city were continually making excursions into the country around. He fixed his quarters for the night, after his first day's march homeward, in a little village about three miles to the east of that town; and, taking such precautions as were necessary to guard against surprise, he passed the hours of darkness undisturbed.

It was a fine spring morning when he again put his troops in motion. The sun had just risen; and the fresh, elastic air, driving the vapours of the night before it, had gathered together in the north a wide extent of dark clouds, streaked with the whiter mists that were every moment carried to join them by the wind; while, over all the rest of the sky, the bright sunshine was pouring triumphantly, and flashing upon the diamond drops that the night had left behind on every spray and every blade of grass.

The body of horse which the young citizen commanded moved on quickly, but cautiously, through the by-roads and less direct paths which led between Tournay and Ath; and it had proceeded in this manner for about an hour, when the distant sound of a culverin, followed by a heavy discharge of artillery, was borne upon his ear from the westward. The troopers listened eagerly, with no small curiosity written on their countenances; but the face of Albert Maurice scarcely betrayed that he heard the sounds, except by a curl of the lip, slight indeed, but bitter and contemptuous. He rode on without comment; and, shortly after, as he led his force over the summit of a small hill, he could perceive on looking towards Tournay—though the place itself was hidden by some wavy ground that intervened—a long stream of thick, white smoke, drifting down the valley in which that city stands. He drew in his horse for a moment, and gazed upon the sight; and then, putting his force into a quicker pace, pursued his road onward towards Ghent.

The path which they were following entered, at about the distance of two miles from the spot where they then were, the high road from Tournay to Oudenarde; and, passing among some woody grounds, it lay very much concealed from observation. As they came near the open road, however, Albert Maurice himself proceeded a little in advance of the line to reconnoitre, before he led his forces forth from the less exposed

ground below. But ere he reached it, the sounds that he heard were sufficient to satisfy him that the highway was occupied by some party of armed men, either friends or foes. The prospect of meeting with the forces commanded by the Duke of Gueldres was little less disagreeable to him than that of encountering a superior body of the enemy, and he accordingly halted his men, riding slowly along the narrow border of copse which separated the low grounds from the high road, in order to ascertain who were his immediate neighbours, and what was the direction they were taking. The trampling of horses, the jingling of armour, laughter, merriment, and oaths, announced sufficiently the presence of a military force; and the moment after, a break in the belt of wood showed him the rear of a body of horsemen passing on in a continuous but somewhat irregular line towards Tournay; while the straight crosses of cut cloth which they wore sewed upon their gambesons, at once designated them as the adherents of France in opposition to Burgundy, the partisans of which dukedom were as universally designated by a cross-cross, or cross of St. Andrew.

The young burgher paused for several minutes; and fixing his eye upon a break some way farther down the road, watched till the spears and plumes began to pass by that aperture also, and, by means of the two, easily ascertained that the party he beheld did not amount to more than five hundred men. Though from various traces of recent strife, joined to the merriment that reigned amongst them, he judged—and judged rightly—that the French were returning to Tournay after some successful skirmish, which, he doubted not, had taken place with the Duke of Gueldres; yet, the superiority of his own numbers and his confidence in his own powers, determined him immediately to attack the enemy.

This resolution was no sooner formed than executed; and although the space was narrow for the evolutions of cavalry, the road having on one side a large piece of marshy ground, and on the other a scattered wood; yet so unprepared were the French for the attack of the Gandois, and so skilfully did the young citizen employ a raw against a veteran force, that the old soldiers of Louis at once gave way before the fresh levies of Ghent; and while many a man found an ignoble death in the morass, those were the happiest who, by sharp spurring, made their way unscathed to Tournay.

A battery of small cannon, which enfiladed the part of the road that led directly to the gate, protected the fugitives in their retreat; and Albert Maurice, not fully aware of the state of the garrison, and the amount of forces it could pour forth upon his small corps, hastened to retreat from before the walls as soon as he found himself exposed to their artillery. The way seemed clear before him; yet—as he knew that the enterprise of the Duke of Gueldres was to have taken place about that time, and from the firing he had heard in the morning, doubted not it had been attempted on that very day—he could not believe that so small a party as that which he had just driven back within the walls, would have ventured forth alone against the superior force of the Gandois; and he felt sure that some larger body of French troops must still lie between him and the retreating army of the Duke of Gueldres.

Under these circumstances, and fearful of tarnishing the gloss of his success by encountering a defeat at last, he caused the country to be well reconnoitred as he advanced; and ere long, the reported appearance of a large force seen moving in the line of the high road, about a league in advance, made him resolve once more to take the paths through the wood to the east, however circuitous and inconvenient, being very well assured, from his knowledge of the country and from his acquaintance with the plans of the people of Ghent, that the line of operations of either party could not have extended far to the east of the *Chemin d' Oudenarde*, as the high road was called.

He accordingly at once quitted the broad causeway which led directly to Ghent, and passing across some of the wide yellow mustard fields that lay to the right, he gained, unobserved, the shelter of the scattered woods through which he had been before advancing. As he marched on, however, the appearance of some of the fearful vestiges of warfare—now a slain horse—now a long track of blood—now some piece of armour, or some offensive weapon cast away in flight—showed that a deadly strife must have passed not far from the ground over which he was marching. These tokens of battle and defeat, however, soon became less frequent; and, by care and circumspection, he was enabled to guide his forces to a safe distance from Tournay without encountering any of the bands of either party which were scattered over that part of the province. Not knowing the state of the country, and determined, whatever were the case, to force

his way onward to Ghent without loss of time, he did not choose to detach any parties from his main body; but he was of course very anxious for intelligence, and it was not long before he received as much as was necessary for the purpose of determining his after proceedings. Ere he had marched half a league, several stragglers belonging to the army of Ghent joined his force; and from them he learned, that on that very morning the Duke of Gueldres had attacked and burned the suburbs of Tournay; but that in effecting his retreat, his rear-guard had been charged by a small force from the town, and had been nearly cut to pieces, notwithstanding extraordinary efforts on the part of the duke himself. That prince was reported to be dead or taken, and the rest of the army had retreated in no small confusion upon Oudenarde.

This discomfiture of the Flemish forces, and the disgrace inflicted on his country, were of course painful, as a whole, to the young citizen; but there were parts of the detail which were not so unpleasant; for his successes of course stood out in brighter light from their contrast with the failure of the larger division; and as it appeared, by the account of the fugitives, that the party which had defeated the Duke of Gueldres was the very same that he himself had in turn overthrown and driven into Tournay, the mortification would be in some degree softened to the people of Ghent, while he could not find in his heart to grieve very bitterly for their defeated commander.

The intelligence that he now received of the state of the garrison of Tournay—which it appeared was very scanty, but bold and enterprising in the extreme—made him resolve to halt for the night at the first village on the road, in order to keep the forces of that city in check, while the dispersed parties of Flemings effected their retreat. He accordingly took up his quarters at the little town of Frasne, on the edge of the wood, and immediately sent out parties to reconnoitre the country, and bring in any stragglers they might meet with. Few were found, indeed; but from their information, the young burgher was led to suppose that the great body of the forces, which had issued from Ghent two days before, had made good its retreat, without any farther loss than the discomfiture of its rear-guard.

By the time these facts were fully ascertained, the evening was too far advanced to make any farther movement; and Albert Maurice, having taken measures to hold his present position in

security, laid by the weighty armour with which, according to the custom of the day, he was encumbered on the march, and strolled out alone into the wood, to give way to thoughts which had long been sternly pressing for attention.

He was now returning towards Ghent, where he could not hide from himself that new scenes of intrigue, of anxiety, and of trouble, lay before him. His previous conduct in the same career had given birth to regrets which he had determined to scan and try, more accurately than he ever yet had done; and from his judgment on the past, to form a firm and inflexible determination for the future. He found, too, that now was the moment when the self-examination must begin, if ever it was to be attempted; and many circumstances combined to render it less painful than it had appeared before. Previous to the expedition in which he was now engaged, the commune with his own heart had offered so little but pure bitterness, that he had avoided it with care. But his recent successes, in which was to be found no matter for self-reproach, afforded him something wherewith to balance more painful contemplations; and with a decided purpose of indulging that craving for calm reflection which had long preyed upon him, he went forth totally alone, merely saying to his attendants that he would speedily return.

Of course, it is not possible to follow the thoughts of Albert Maurice through all the tortuous and uncertain ways which the human heart pursues in its examination of itself. The result, however, was painful. He compared what he had done, now that power was given into his hands, with what he had proposed to do, when that power existed but in expectation. Not six months before he had determined, if ever circumstances should favour the exertion of his abilities in the wide arena of political strife, to dedicate all the talents and energy of his mind solely to the good of his country—to free her from oppression—to remedy the evils of her situation—to open the way for arts and civilization—to place laws and rights upon such a footing that they could never be doubted nor destroyed—and to accomplish all this by the most calm and peaceful means, without spilling one unnecessary drop of blood—without causing one eye through all the land to shed a tear.

Such had been his purpose—but what had been his conduct, and what had he become? He had appropriated to himself nearly the whole power of the state. He had obtained influence

greater than his fondest expectations had held out. He had not improved one law. He had not removed one evil. He had seen, under his own authority, anarchy substituted for civil order and domestic peace. He had involved himself in the meanest wiles of faction and intrigue. He had beheld innocent blood shed by the hands of the populace. He had himself brought about the death of two noble-minded men, who, his own heart told him, were innocent of the crimes with which they were charged; and conscience thundered in his ear that they were murdered for his ambition. He could no longer look upon himself as a patriot. He knew himself to have become solely an ambitious demagogue; and, look around him on which side he would, he saw no means of extricating himself or his country from the state into which he had aided to immerse it, but by pursuing the same dark and intricate intrigues, the mean cunning of which he felt bitterly to be degrading to his better nature; by shedding more blood; by stirring up more discord; and by plunging deeper and deeper into the abyss of anarchy and confusion.

While such a conviction forced itself upon his mind, he almost shrunk from himself; and the small, still voice within, whispered that but one way was left—to yield the hand of Mary of Burgundy to any prince whose state and situation offered the most immediate prospect of benefit and support to his country—to make the price of that fair hand and the rich dowry that went with it, the full recognition of such popular rights as would put the freedom and prosperity of Flanders for ever beyond a doubt,—and on his own part to resign the hopes and aspirations that had led him so far astray. But those hopes—those aspirations—had become parts of his very soul; and to require him to cast them from him, was but to bid him die. As the bare idea crossed his mind of resigning Mary of Burgundy—of seeing her in the arms of another—the blood rushed up into his head with violence; and he paused abruptly on his way, resolved, if thought presented such images, to think no more. The good and the evil principle were in his heart at eternal war; calm reflection instantly gave the good full promise of victory; but the evil had but to call up the idea of Mary of Burgundy as the wife of another, in order to banish reflection altogether, and every better purpose along with it.

He had, by this time, advanced somewhat far into the wood; and the faint grey of the sky announced that the sun was sinking

rapidly below the horizon, and warned him to return to the village. The road he had followed was a long grassy path, cut by the wheels of the wood-carts; and there was no mistaking his way back. But, as he paused, determined to think no more, since thought required such bitter sacrifices, he looked onward vacantly, ere he turned, directing with difficulty his mind towards external things, the better to withdraw it from himself. As he did so, he remarked, at the bottom of the slope, down which the path proceeded, some large white object lying amongst the long grass which fringed a little forest stream. The distance was not more than a hundred yards in advance; and attracted, he knew not very well why, he strode on almost unconsciously towards the spot. As he came nearer, the object which had caught his eye assumed the form of a horse, either dead or asleep; and to ascertain which was the case he still walked forward, till he stood close beside it, and found that it was the carcase of a splendid charger, which had dropped, apparently, from exhaustion and loss of blood. A rich military saddle and a poitrel, inlaid with gold, announced that the rank of the rider must have been high; while a fresh wound in the poor beast's side, and another in his thigh, seemed to show that he had been engaged in the skirmish of that morning.

Albert Maurice gazed on the horse for a moment, not exactly with indifference, but with no great interest in a sight which had been frequently before his eyes during the last two or three days. The thing that principally attracted his attention, indeed, was the costliness of the caparisons; and he looked round the little glade in which he now stood, to see if he could perceive any further traces of the horse's owner. His eye instantly rested upon a pile of splendid arms, cast heedlessly down at a short distance; and as he walked forward to examine them also, a man started up, as if from sleep, amongst the fern which there thickly clothed the forest ground, exclaiming—"Who goes there?"

A single glance sufficed to show Albert Maurice that he stood in presence of the Duke of Gueldres; and that prince almost as soon perceived whom he himself had encountered. No great love existed between them, it is true; but a natural compassion for the defeat and disappointment which the duke had that day sustained, and a conviction that that defeat, together with his own success, had removed all danger from the rivalry of the other, greatly softened the feeling of enmity in the bosom of the young

citizen; and a word would have disarmed him entirely. The contrary, however, was the case with Adolphus of Gueldres, who, naturally furious and impatient, had been rendered almost insane by defeat and disgrace. He had heard, too, it would seem, of the late successes of Albert Maurice; and jealousy and envy were thus added to hatred. His words and his manner had been quick and vehement, even before he had seen who it was that roused him. But no sooner did he distinguish the features of the young citizen, than the thought of his own overthrow and of the triumph of Albert Maurice, mingled with remembrance of the opposition he had formerly met with and the cool contempt with which he had been treated on their last meeting, all rose up in his mind; and his countenance became convulsed with passion.

"Ha!" he cried, "you here, Sir Mechanic! you here to insult and triumph over me!—Or have you come to finish out what we but began in the town-hall of Ghent? Doubtless you have!—Quick, then, quick! Draw, sir,—draw your sword, I say!—Thank God, there is no one here, either to part us, or to see the Duke of Gueldres stain his blade with the blood of a low citizen!"

Albert Maurice himself was not, naturally, the most patient of men; and he instantly laid his hand upon his sword. But nobler feelings checked him the moment after; and he paused in the act, saying,—"You had better reflect, my lord!"

Before he could add another word, however, the Duke of Gueldres struck him a blow with the pommel of his weapon, that made him reel; and the next moment their blades were crossed.

Complete master of every military exercise, powerful, active, quicksighted, and calm, Albert Maurice was far more than a match for the Duke of Gueldres, though that prince had always been reputed a stout and skilful man-at-arms. So great, indeed, did the young President feel his own superiority to be, that, had he not been heated in some degree by the blow he had received, he would, most probably, have contented himself with wounding or disarming his antagonist. But he *was* heated with the insult; and in four passes, the sword of the Duke of Gueldres—turned from its course—was wounding the empty air over the shoulder of Albert Maurice, while the blade of the young citizen passed direct through the chest of his adversary.

Albert Maurice recovered his weapon, and gazed for a moment on the Duke, whose mortal career he felt must be at its close.

But that unhappy prince stood before him for an instant, still grasping his sword, and still apparently firm upon his feet, though a ghastly swimming of his eyes showed what a convulsive agony was moving his frame within. He made no further effort to lunge again; but he stood there by a sort of rigid effort, which sufficed for a time to keep him from falling, though that was all. The next moment the sword dropped. He reeled giddily; and then fell back with a fearful sort of sobbing in his throat.

Albert Maurice kneeled down beside him, and strove to stanch the blood (which was now flowing copiously from his wounds) in such a degree as to enable him to speak, should he have any directions to give before he died. He brought some water, also, from the brook hard by, and sprinkled his face; and the Duke almost instantly opened his eyes, and gazed wildly about for a moment.

Then, as his glance met that of Albert Maurice, he exclaimed, in the same harsh and brutal tone he had before used,—"You have slain me, fellow! you have slain me! Out upon it, churl! you have spilt some of the best blood of the land."

"My lord," said Albert Maurice, solemnly, "you have brought it on yourself. But think not of that at this moment! You are dying. There is such a thing as another world; and, oh! repent you of your sins while you are yet in this!"

"Is it *you* tell me to repent?" cried the Duke, faintly,—"you, who have shortened my time for repentance. What know you of my sins?"

"Nothing, but by report, my lord," replied the young citizen; "except, indeed,—except on one occasion,—the fire at the pleasure-house of Lindenmar—the death of the young heir of Hannut!"

The Duke groaned. "Oh! were that all," cried he—"were that all,—that might soon be pardoned; for my own hands in some degree undid what my own voice commanded. But stay, stay," he added, speaking far more quickly, "stay! The old man, they say, still grieves for his child—still, perhaps, suspects me. Fly to him quick. Tell him the boy did not die in the flames of Lindenmar. Tell him—tell him that I bore him away myself. Tell him that, bad as I was, I could not resist the look of helpless infancy; that I carried him away wrapped in my mantle; and when my own boy died, bred him as mine; that I was kind to him—that I loved him, till the butchers of Duke Philip murdered him, when they cast me into prison at Namur."

A light broke at once upon the mind of the young citizen. "Good God!" he cried,—"he is not dead. He lives, my lord—he lives! He escaped—found refuge with his own father—ay, and was instrumental in procuring your liberation from prison. He lives—indeed, he lives!"

The eyes of the Duke of Gueldres fixed upon him as he spoke, with an intense and half-doubting gaze. But as the young burgher repeated earnestly, "He lives!" the dying man, by a great effort, half raised himself from the ground, clasped his hands together, and exclaimed, "Thank God!"

They were the last words he ever spoke; for almost as he uttered them, he closed his eyes, as if a faint sickness had come over him, fell back upon the turf with a convulsive shudder; and in a few moments Adolphus of Gueldres was no more.

Albert Maurice gazed upon him with a feeling of painful interest. He had slain him, it is true, under circumstances which he believed to justify the deed. But no one, that is not in heart a butcher, can, under any circumstances, take life hand to hand, without feeling that a shadow has settled over existence. There is always something to be remembered—always something that can never be forgotten. In the case of the young citizen, too, the cloud was of a deeper shade; for he felt that in the death of the Duke of Gueldres,—however much justified by the immediate provocation,—he had taken another life in that course of ambition, in which he foresaw that many more must fall.

Thus, in gloomy bitterness, he took his way back to the village, and, without any explanation, gave orders that the dead body should be brought in with honour. The soldiers concluded that both horse and man had died by the hands of the enemy; and Albert Maurice, in quitting his quarters the next morning, gave strict directions that the remains of the deceased prince should be immediately sent after him to Ghent.

After his departure, however, before a bier could be got ready, and all the necessary preparations entered into, a party from the town of Tournay swept the little village of Frasne; and the body of the Duke, being found there, was carried away by the French. Due honours were shown to the corpse by the people of Tournay; and many of the writers of that age attribute the death of Adolphus, the bad Duke of Gueldres, to the successful sortie of the garrison of that city.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was barely dawn when Albert Maurice began his last day's march towards Ghent; and though the distance was considerable, at the hour of three in the afternoon, he was within a league of the city. The number of armed men that he now overtook—both single individuals and small bands—showed him that the force which had retreated from before Tournay must have lately passed. And with a sort of anxious apprehension in regard to the machinations which might have taken place in Ghent during his absence, he spoke personally with almost all the stragglers he saw; and, by a few kind words, easily induced a number of the half-disciplined burghers and peasantry to join the small force he was leading into Ghent—most of them being very willing to pass for part of a conquering rather than part of a conquered army.

At the distance of about two miles from the city—at a point where the town itself was hidden by a detached wood—Albert Maurice perceived a small body of horsemen coming slowly towards him; but as such a sight had nothing extraordinary in it, he took but little heed of the party till it was within a hundred yards, when, to his unutterable surprise, he beheld the portly figure of worthy Martin Fruse leading the van on horseback,—a situation which the good burgher, as may well be remembered, had never coveted in his most agile and enterprising age, and which had become quite abhorrent to his feelings now that years and bulk had weighed down all activity.

"Halt your troops!—halt your troops, my dear boy!" cried the worthy merchant, in some trepidation. "Halt your troops, and listen to me while I tell you——"

"Had you not better speak with the honourable President apart?" said one of the party, in whom Albert Maurice instantly recognised Maître Pierre, the eschevin who had been called to examine the dwelling of the old Lord of Neufchâtel; although, on glancing his eye over the rest, he could recal the face of none other amongst the stout men-at-arms, of which the chief part of the band was composed.

Seeing that there was something to be communicated, and judging that no very agreeable intelligence awaited him, from

the evident agitation of his friends, he gave the command to halt his little force; and then leading the way into the meadow, begged his uncle to explain the cause of his perturbation.

Martin Fruse began with a violent declamation upon the evils of riding on horseback, and the perils thereupon attending; but he ended with a recapitulation of dangers somewhat more real, which awaited his nephew if he ventured within the gates of Ghent. It seemed that the violent party—as Albert Maurice had apprehended—had, under the skilful tactics of the druggist Ganay, completely outmanœuvred the little junta which the young President had left to keep them in check; and now that it was too late, Albert Maurice perceived that he had suffered his thirst for military renown to lead him aside from the paths of saner policy. Ganay himself had become the supreme object of the people's adoration; and having leagued himself by some skilful management with the Duke of Cleves on the one hand, and the populace on the other, he had been entirely successful in all the measures he had proposed to the council of magistrates. The States General had not again met, it was true; but a new party had been created in the town. The city of Ghent, in fact, had become completely divided, but divided unequally; for though a strong and influential body had attached themselves to Martin Fruse, the multitude adhered to his opponent.

Ganay, indeed, the worthy burgher said, not daring openly to assail one whose successes in the field were daily subject of rejoicing with the citizens, affected to act upon the instructions and desires of Albert Maurice himself; and the complete, or rather apparent union between them, which had formerly existed, had aided to deceive the people. Martin Fruse had reproached the druggist, and reasoned with the magistrates, in vain; and all that he had gained was the certainty that, from some cause which he could not define, Ganay had become his nephew's most bitter enemy, though he still affected to regard him as a friend. Private information, also, had reached Martin Fruse early in the morning, that—as soon as it had been ascertained the young citizen was on his march with the intention of reaching the city in the course of the day—Ganay, supported both by the nobility under the Duke of Cleves and by the more violent members of the States, had contrived a scheme for arresting the President that very night, at a grand banquet to be given in honour of his return; and the large body of discontented soldiery which had

been pouring into the town during the day, and who were already jealous of those who had been more successful than themselves, seemed to offer the means of accomplishing this purpose in security.

Martin Fruse, losing all presence of mind at the danger of his beloved nephew, had determined to quit the city, to meet and warn the object of this conspiracy, of his danger, ere he entered the town. The eschevin, who had been called to the hotel of the Lord of Neufchâtel, conscious that some suspicions which he had ventured to breathe concerning the death of that nobleman had rendered him obnoxious to the party which for the time appeared triumphant, had joined the good burgher; and the danger that seemed to threaten all, had even overcome the objection of Martin Fruse to the use of a horse.

This tale was soon told; and Albert Maurice, from his own private knowledge of all the springs that were moving the dark cabals within the walls of the city before him, saw much deeper into the dangers and difficulties of his own situation than those who detailed the circumstances which had occurred since his departure. He saw that the crisis of his fate was come; and without once entertaining the vain thought of avoiding it, he merely paused to calculate how he might pass through it most triumphantly.

Fear or hesitation, doubt or even anxiety, never seemed to cross his mind for a moment. He felt, it is true, that his victory or his fall must be now complete, and that he was marching forward to a strife that must be final and decisive: but still he was eager to bring the whole to a close—perhaps from that confidence in his own powers, which is ever one great step towards success. He heard his uncle to an end with an unchanged countenance; and then, without a single observation on the intelligence he had just received, he spoke a few words to the eschevin, in a low tone, in regard to the inquisition he had charged him to make in the house of the old Lord of Neufchâtel. The answers seemed to satisfy him well; for ever and anon he bowed his head with a calm but somewhat bitter smile, saying merely,—"So! Ay! Is it so?"

At length he demanded suddenly,—pointing to a man-at-arms who had come up with his uncle and the party which had accompanied him, and now sat with his visor up, displaying a fresh and weather-beaten countenance, well seamed with

scars of ancient wounds,—"Who is that? I should know his face."

"That," whispered his uncle, riding close up to him—"that is good Mathew Gournay, the captain of adventurers, who was with us in the year fifty, when we made a stand against the Count of Charolois. He said you had sent for him."

"I did, I did!" replied the young burgher; "but I had forgotten all about it, in the events that have since taken place. Where is the prisoner I left in the town prison?"

"Ay! there is one of their bold acts," answered Martin Fruse; and, as he spoke, the countenance of Albert Maurice turned deadly pale, thinking they had put to death the man whom he had promised to set free; but his uncle soon relieved him. "Ay! there is one of their bold acts," he said; "they have moved him from the town-house to the Prévôt's prison near the gates, and threaten to do him to death to-morrow by cock-crow. Maillotin du Bac would fain have had him tried by the eschevins this morning; but the Duke of Cleves made so long a speech, and brought so much other business before the council, that they agreed to put it off till to-morrow; when he is to be interrogated at six o'clock, and have the question at seven if he refuse to confess."

Again the President mused, without reply, though he saw that to extort confessions which would tend to create a charge against him, might be the object of the Prévôt in reserving the Vert Gallant for the torture. At length, riding up to the old man-at-arms, he led him apart, and conversed with him earnestly for near a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time he conducted him, with the dozen of troopers who accompanied him, to the last constabulary of the horse, which had shared in his own successful expedition, and then spoke a few words with the constable, or leader of the troop, who, with a low reverence, dropped back amongst his men. The followers of Matthew Gournay fell into the ranks; the adventurer put himself at their head; and scarcely a difference was perceivable in the order of the band.

As soon as all this was completed, Albert Maurice rode back to his uncle and the rest of his party, and informed them calmly that it was absolutely necessary—notwithstanding all the events which had lately taken place—that they should return to Ghent, and re-enter the town by one of the opposite gates; so as to

leave it at least doubtful whether they had or had not held any communication with himself.

What he required of them was, perhaps, somewhat hard, considering that they were peaceable men, who had no small reason to fear for their lives, and had no immediate stimulus to make them risk so much willingly. But Martin Fruse had seen his nephew accomplish such great things in the face of every sort of probability, and the tone in which Albert Maurice spoke was so calm and assured, that the wishes of the young citizen were received as commands; and the small party of citizens, now left without an escort, rode off; while the young President still halted on the road, to give them time to make the circuit proposed before his entrance.

As soon as he judged that this object was accomplished, Albert Maurice again put his troops in motion, and advanced slowly towards the city. As he emerged from the low wood that had hitherto screened him, he despatched a trumpet to announce his approach to the council of Ghent, and the States of Flanders; and directed the messenger especially to speak with Signior Ganay, one of the magistrates of the town. He then resumed a quicker pace, and approached rapidly the walls of the city.

Before he reached the gates, however, it became evident that his harbinger had not spared the spur, and had already executed his commission. A large body of horsemen were seen to issue forth, accompanied by a crowd on foot; and loud shouts of joy and gratulation met the ear of Albert Maurice,—showing that the populace at least, to whom Ganay had first made his court by affecting friendship for their victorious President, had not yet become aware of the designs of his enemies. But such demonstrations of the popular joy on his return, were received by Albert Maurice as no sign that the purpose of destroying him did not exist; nor as any reason for expecting that his overthrow would not be attempted; nor as any proof that the people would oppose or resent it; for no one knew better than himself how slight a charge will condemn the most innocent before the fierce tribunal of the multitude, or felt more bitterly how readily those who now greeted his return would shout at his execution.

He was surprised, however, as the two parties drew near each other, to find that the body which had issued forth to receive him was headed by Ganay himself, and was composed of all those whom he had the greatest reason to look upon as his

political enemies. But Albert Maurice was not to be deceived; and though he received the compliments and gratulations of the citizens on his return, and their thanks for his great services, with a smiling countenance, and bland untroubled brow, yet his mind clearly divined the motives of so much courtesy; and he internally scoffed at the grossness of the deceit they attempted to play off upon him. He bowed, and smiled, and doffed his cap and plume to every one who affected to congratulate him; but he well understood that he was surrounded by doubtful friends or concealed enemies; and watched carefully every changing expression of the faces round him.

The populace on foot, who crowded round, with loud and vehement shouts of "Long live the noble President! Long live the conqueror of Le Lude!" he clearly saw were sincere enough. But in the set speeches and formal courtesy of the different members of the States he beheld much to distrust, and calmly prepared for those great and bold measures which were alone fitted to meet the exigency of the moment.

Albert Maurice was a reader of the human countenance,—a book, every volume of which is easy to comprehend, when we know the language in which it is written, or, in other words, when we understand the general character of the individual. Ganay was a master in the art of dissimulation; but the young citizen was so intimately acquainted with every turn of his dark mind, that even the slight traces which he suffered to appear, were as legible to Albert Maurice, as if he had seen into his heart. He marked a transient and scarcely perceptible shade come over the brow of the druggist, whenever the people vociferated their noisy welcome. He saw, too, that ever, on each shout, Ganay redoubled his attention to himself; and he clearly perceived that, from the moment they met, his former friend attached himself to his side, and strove anxiously to prevent his holding any private communication with the leaders of his troops. From all this, he judged that the tidings he had received from Martin Fruse were substantially correct; and that the honours shown to him on his return, were only to deceive the people, while any act that was meditated against him was to be executed at night, after the lower orders had retired to rest.

Albert Maurice affected to be entirely deceived, and rode on with the party who had come to welcome him, with every

appearance of friendship and confidence. He spoke freely and calmly with those around him; addressed Ganay frequently in a low and confidential tone; and, at the same time, assumed all that state and dignity, which he knew that his enemies expected him to display. He marked, too, with a feeling of suppressed scorn, the significant glances which passed between his foes, as—taking on himself the principal place, and with an air and demeanour, which might have suited the most potent monarch in Christendom—he rode through the gates of Ghent amidst the acclamations of the people.

While thus Albert Maurice proceeded, surrounded by a great number of the high citizens, the troops he commanded followed in a long line, now swelled to the amount of nearly fifteen hundred men. The whole cavalcade moved on towards the market-place; but some persons, who remained near the drawbridge, remarked that the last band of soldiers did not follow the rest; but, halting at the gate, relieved the guard that was there on duty, and then passed on, in a different direction, by the low streets which ran under the walls. At the same time, however, three of the troopers were detached, and, at once, repassing the gates, galloped off at full speed, in the direction of Heusden and Melle. It was farther observed, and commented upon in other days, that in about two hours afterwards, three bands of men-at-arms came up from the same quarter, at a quick pace, and entered the city, without even being questioned by the guard. To what spot they went in the city was not very clearly ascertained, but it was generally reported that they made their way in small parties to the town-house.

In the meanwhile, Albert Maurice and the rest pursued their march towards that building, the crowds increasing every moment as they passed, and rending the air with their acclamations. With his helmet, lance, and shield, carried by pages behind him, as if he had been the most distinguished knight in the land—with his cap and plume in his hand, and bowing his fine head low at every shout of the multitude, the young citizen advanced towards what was called the Perron of the Hôtel de Ville, on which he found collected, to do him honour, the Duke of Cleves and a number of the other nobles of the town and neighbourhood. Knowing their league against him, and what a mockery they considered this public reception of a simple burgher, Albert Maurice could scarcely prevent the scorn he felt in his heart

from curling his proud lip. But he did prevent it, and merely thinking, like Hamlet,—"They fool me to the top of my bent,"—he dismounted from his horse at the steps, and played exactly the part which he well knew they expected from him. After receiving, with a degree both of haughtiness and humility, the gratulations of the nobles upon his successful expedition, he turned and addressed the lower orders of Ghent in a long and flattering harangue, throughout which, the close of every period, was drowned in the enthusiastic cheers of the populace.

"It were hard, my friends," he added, in conclusion, "that you should all come out hither to welcome my return, and I should give you no sign of my good will. Fain would I have you all to sup with me; but, in good faith, there are so many here,—some twenty thousand, as I guess,—that no house could hold the multitude I see around me. However, it is a fair and beautiful evening, and there is no better roof than the sky. Now, as these noble lords and worthy merchants have invited me to banquet with them within, I invite you all to sup here in the market-place, and by seven of the clock you shall find good ale and beef enough to satisfy you, if I give the last stiver of my private fortune to entertain the worthy artisans of Ghent."

A loud shout burst from the people, but Ganay and his friends exchanged glances not of the most pleasant kind. Nor were their looks rendered more placid, when they heard an order given by the young President to his troops, purporting that they were to stable their horses in whatever sheds they could find round the market-place, and to quarter themselves in the wide halls and vacant chambers of the Hôtel de Ville. Ganay even ventured to remonstrate against turning the town-house into a barrack, but he was instantly silenced by Albert Maurice.

"I have heard, my excellent, good friend," he replied, "since my return to Ghent, that the fifteen thousand men, who were driven like sheep from before Tournay, have been received in this city, and quartered in the different barracks. I know, therefore, that there can be no room to spare, and what you urge with regard to the illegality of bringing troops into the town-house, you must well know does not apply in the present case. The troops which I have resolved to station there are the troops of the city of Ghent, not those of either a foreign or a native prince."

"But for the informality of the thing," urged Ganay, seeing

that by the very measures which he had taken to secure the safe execution of his purpose against the young citizen, he had, in fact, over-reached himself—"but for the informality of the thing, would it not be better, as there is no room for them in the town, to march them into any of the pleasant little villages in the neighbourhood?"

"What!" exclaimed Albert Maurice, assuming an air of indignation;—"what! make the victorious troops, that have so well served the city, give place to those who have brought nothing but disgrace upon us! No, no, Master Ganay, let us hear no more of this. My orders must be obeyed;" and so saying, he turned and advanced towards the door of the town-house.

A short and rapid conversation was now carried on, in a low tone, between the druggist and the Duke of Cleves, as they ascended the steps towards the hall. "It will be impossible to-night," whispered the noble.

"If he live over to-morrow," replied Ganay, "no earthly power will overthrow him."

A few words succeeded, in so low a tone, that even, by the parties who spoke, their meaning was probably gathered more completely by their mutual looks, than by any distinct sounds. A white-haired old soldier, however, who was pushing up the steps after the young President, just heard Ganay add, "If I do, will you justify and defend me?"

"Anything to get rid of him!" replied the Duke, emphatically; and they both passed on.

The sun was, by this time, beginning to descend in the western sky; and on entering the town-house, the young citizen retired to the apartments which had been assigned him in that building, and remained long in consultation with various persons, who were admitted to him one after another. The individuals who thus visited him were all marked by the opposite faction, which remained in the other parts of the town-house; and it was seen that, besides Martin Fruse, and a number of the burghers adhering to the party of that good citizen, almost all the leaders of the bands which had accompanied the young President in his expedition to Lille and Douai were admitted, and remained with him long.

All this, however, appeared natural enough; and though his troops, in quartering themselves in different parts of the building, according to his orders, seemed to take upon themselves a

tone of authority and power not very pleasing to his adversaries, yet this also might pass for the swagger and insolence of military success; nor did it excite any very great surprise. As the evening went on, however, a number of persons were observed ascending to his apartments, whose faces no one recognised. Some stayed and some returned; but it was evident that they were not citizens of Ghent, and great was the anxiety and discussion which these appearances caused amongst the enemies of the young President. Every means was taken to discover whence they came and what was their errand, but it was all in vain. The Duke of Cleves retired to his own hotel, to prepare for the scenes that were about to take place; and Ganay waited eagerly the coming of the hour appointed for the banquet, which would put an end, he believed, for ever, to transactions which, from many causes, he both doubted and feared.

Nevertheless, his sensations were of a mixed, and even painful nature, and his conclusions in regard to the conduct of Albert Maurice were less clear and decided than they had ever been before. He did not and would not believe that the President suspected the precise design of those who had contrived his overthrow; but he saw evidently that he was not deceived by all the fair appearances which had welcomed him back to Ghent; and he felt that the moment was come when, as the young citizen had long before foreseen, the immediate destruction of the one was necessary to the safety of the other. That conviction in his own bosom of course made him believe that Albert Maurice was equally alive to the same fact; and as the means which he had so carefully prepared during the absence of the other had been, in some degree, rendered vain by the measures that the President had taken, the druggist now stood resolved to snatch the first opportunity of executing his purpose by any means, however great the risk, well knowing that the peril of delay was still greater.

And yet, strange to say, there was within the bosom of that man,—hardened as he was by crimes, and still more hardened by the struggle of passions concealed within his breast through a long life,—strange to say, there was a feeling of deep regret, of bitter repugnance, when he thought of the very act he planned for his own security. If ever there had been, in the course of all his existence, a being that he had sincerely loved, besides his own unhappy son, that being had been Albert Maurice; and

though, in the scenes of civil faction and the strife of contending interests and desires which they had lately passed through, that affection had been apparently smothered, it is wonderful how freshly it rose up in his heart, when he thought that Albert Maurice must die by his means,—possibly by his own hand.

The fatal creed he held of man's entire mortality, made him fearless of death himself, and careless of inflicting it on others; but, perhaps, by teaching him that the loves and affections of this life were all, it made them take a deeper hold upon his heart, when once they could grasp it by any means; and for a moment, as he thought of cutting off the noble being whose powers he had so often admired,—of extinguishing for ever all those fiery energies and bright aspirations he had watched from their first breaking forth to their full expansion,—he shuddered at the task.

The people without, witnessing the preparations for the banquet to which the young citizen had invited them, from time to time shouted forth his name with loud applause, and there was a voice within the bosom of Ganay that echoed their praises. "He is indeed a splendid creature," he thought; "and if ever there was one calculated to win all hearts, and lead men and nations on to scenes and glories such as the world has never yet seen, he is the man. Yet after all, he must die! and 'tis but like the slaughter of a mighty stag or a noble boar; and death,—which ends all things,—perhaps, when the pain and the pleasure of life are fairly balanced, is the crowning good that renders the whole equal at last: but I must speed to see all prepared!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Never had the town of Ghent witnessed so magnificent a sight as on the night after the return of Albert Maurice. The whole market-place before the Stadt Huys, illuminated by a thousand torches, was crowded with people regaling at long tables, which groaned beneath the burden of good cheer. The young President had spared no means to satisfy all; and, by the magic influence of gold, had, in the short time which had elapsed

since his return, conjured up a festival more like some of those fairy banquets depicted in an Eastern tale, than anything in real life. Thousands and thousands, too, of the wealthier classes, whose circumstances raised them above those who came to partake of his bounty, moved through the open spaces, enjoying the scene. The Perron of the Hôtel de Ville was crowded with guards, officers, and attendants, looking over the gay and happy sight which the square afforded; and above all, rose the dark mass of the town-house, with a broad blaze flashing forth from all the open windows, while the sound of music from within, and the glancing of figures moving rapidly across the lights, offered links of interest between the feelings of the crowd without and the transactions that were passing in the building.

A knot of the more curious citizens had stationed themselves on the little rise by the fountain, and watched eagerly the windows of the hall, where the banquet was just about to take place; and at length, when a loud flourish of trumpets echoed out upon the air, some of them were heard to exclaim, "Now! now they are coming to the tables!—See, see! they are passing along!—There is the Duke of Cleves; I know him by the limp in his gait; and there is the President,—there is the noble President! See how he overtops them all, and how his plumes dance above the highest in the hall! Hurrah for the noble President!" and the multitude catching the sound, burst forth with a loud and universal cheer, that made the buildings around echo and re-echo with the shout.

Although, at that distance, it was difficult to distinguish the persons within, yet the shout was appropriate, for it was, indeed, Albert Maurice who—received as a guest by the States of Flanders, and the nobles and prime burghers of Ghent—was advancing to the seat prepared for him. Long consultations had been previously held in regard to where that seat was to be placed; for feudal states in general required that a marked distinction should be observed between nobles and citizens; but the druggist counselled the nobles to indulge the young citizen's pride to the utmost for that one night. The example of Artevelde—a common tradesman of that very town, who had sat and treated with the highest princes of Europe—was cited, and prevailed; and the President of Ghent took his chair by the Duke of Cleves, with Ganay, by a previous arrangement, seated beside him.

The face of the druggist was uncommonly pale. He had

marked the immense concourse of people in the square; he had marked the multitude of guards and attendants that crowded the terrace and thronged the halls of the town-house; and he knew the infinite perils that attended the deed he had undertaken to perform. Whatever course events might take, he felt that fate brooded heavily over the whole splendid scene; and his small, clear dark eye wandered somewhat wildly round the hall, especially as, in following Albert Maurice towards the seat it had been arranged he was to occupy, the thundering shout of the multitude without burst upon his ear. All, however, apparently passed in tranquil ease: the whole party were seated; and the attendants of the Duke of Cleves—somewhat more numerous than necessary—drew round the upper end of the table. But as they did so, they perceived that they enclosed amongst themselves two or three strange men, against whose intrusion they remonstrated rather roughly. What the others answered was not heard, but they kept their place, and the banquet proceeded.

Everything was rich and splendid, according to the custom of that time; and many a fish and many a fowl appeared upon the table, which have either lost their palatable flavour in latter days, or have been discarded by some depravity of human taste. Albert Maurice ate sparingly, and drank little; but he was more gay and cheerful than, perhaps, any one had ever seen him before; and, with the whole, there was an air of easy dignity, which left any outward difference that might be observed between himself and any of the nobles around, entirely to his advantage.

Ganay drank deep; and, as the banquet proceeded, his cheek grew flushed, and his eye sparkled more; but he was silent, absent, and thoughtful, and shrunk when the eye of Albert Maurice rested on him, even for a moment, in conversation. At length the Duke of Cleves rose, and addressed the druggist briefly, saying, "Master Ganay, you are an orator, and I am none; and besides, as one of the consuls of the good town of Ghent, the task I am going to put upon you, falls more naturally to you than to me. Fill, then, yon golden hanap to the brim, and express, if you can find language to do so, the gratitude and admiration which the States of Flanders—nobles and commons alike—feel for him who has won the first successes in arms for his native country against her base invaders,—successes which I trust may but be the earnest of many more."

Ganay took the large golden cup, and held it to an officer who filled it with wine: but, as the druggist again brought it back, he leaned his hand upon the edge for a moment, and something seemed, to the eyes of more persons than one, to fall into the chalice. He rose, however, with greater composure than he had hitherto displayed through the evening; and with a happy flow of words, the very choiceness and selection of which made his speech appear far more vigorous and enthusiastic than it really was, he commented on the talents and successes of the young citizen, and thanked him, in the name of the town of Ghent and the States of Flanders, for the services he had rendered to his country.

It is scarcely necessary, perhaps, to state that it was the common custom of the day for a person publicly drinking to another in such a manner, to taste the wine himself, and then to send the cup to him whom he addressed. Ganay, accordingly, at the end of his oration, raised the hanap to his lips, and held it there for a moment; and then, according to form, gave it to the cup-bearer, who presented it to the young burgher. Albert Maurice, after taking the chalice, rose at once, while the eye of the druggist fixed upon him with a gaze, that had something almost fearful in its very intensity.

"Noble lords," he said, in a clear, mellow, steady voice;—"noble lords! dear fellow citizens! worthy men of Flanders! you have been pleased this day to show me honours, far higher than my poor merits gave me any title to expect. The duty of a citizen to his country is one, which, however zealously executed, affords him no claim to thanks; for being an obligation imposed on him by his birth, it binds him strictly through his life; and even at his death, he that has done all within his scope to uphold his native land, has still done nothing but that which he was bound to do. Nevertheless, it is hard to say, how much I rejoice that the men of Ghent and the States of Flanders have thought fit, by such distinguished honours, to reward such poor services as mine. Nor—however grateful to my heart may be your generous applause—are my feelings personal alone. I rejoice more that you have so honoured and rewarded the first man who has been enabled to render service in arms to the state, since her restoration to freedom, than that the first was Albert Maurice. I rejoice chiefly, because I am sure that the distinction shown to me this night—unworthy as I am—will be the means of calling

others forth in the service of the country, whom diffidence of their own powers, or doubts of the state's willingness to accept what they may believe inefficient service, has hitherto kept back from the path of fame. When an individual serves his country to the utmost of his power, as I have before said, he does but his duty to that country, and no more; but when the state recompenses its individual servants even beyond their deserts, it does its duty to itself, and ensures the most zealous services of all its children: for the men who will serve a niggard master well, because it is their duty, will serve a liberal one with their whole heart and soul; and let me say, there is a mighty difference.—Men of Ghent," continued the young President, "and you, noble barons and burghers of Flanders, I give you all deep and heartfelt thanks; and I drink unto you all!"

Albert Maurice had spoken calmly and collectedly, and not a word betrayed that there was one feeling in his heart but tranquil confidence. As he paused and lifted the hanap in his hand, the gaze of Ganay grew more and more intense: his pale lip quivered, and a bright red spot glowed on his ashy cheek, while the young citizen continued to raise the cup slowly towards his lip. Suddenly, however, Albert Maurice paused, and turned his glance with a movement as quick as lightning upon the druggist, into whose face the blood rushed with fearful violence as their eyes met. Sternly and steadfastly the young President gazed on him, while one might count fifty, and then tossing the cup into the midst of the hall, he exclaimed, with a scornful laugh,—"No, no! No, no!—Did you dream that I did not know you, murderer?"

"Know me now, then!" cried Ganay, starting up—"know me now!" and he sprang towards Albert Maurice like a famished tiger. But, at that moment, the man who stood behind his chair strode forward; something bright waved above the druggist as he rose, descended at once upon his head, and cleft its way through to the very eyes.

Ganay fell back from his place, dead upon the floor of the hall; but even as he fell, his hand, armed with a short poniard, aimed an impotent blow at the young President, which struck ringing against the pavement.

"Ho! Close the doors!" cried Albert Maurice, rapidly. "Matthew Gournay, you have done well! Let no one dare to approach the corpse! Look at him as he lies, lords and free

citizens! Look at him as he lies, with the weapon of destruction in his hand! And you, my friends, whom I stationed round about, did you not see him drop the poison in the cup as clearly as I did?"

"We did!—we did!—we did!" cried a dozen voices round the table; and those who were at first inclined to look somewhat fiercely upon these witnesses, soon perceived that the testimony came from all the most honourable citizens of Ghent, who, forewarned, had watched the proceedings of the druggist.

"These are bold and terrible deeds, Sir President!" said the Duke of Cleves.

"Not so bold as some I could name, Duke of Cleves!" replied Albert Maurice, bending his brows sternly upon him. "The man who lies before you has already more than one murder on his head. There are the proofs of his participation in the death of the good old Lord of Neufchâtel, who died by poison while recovering from his wounds. For these proofs I have to thank yon worthy and fearless magistrate, Maître Pierre. These, however, would have been produced before the judges of this city, had I not discovered the purpose of this base assassin to poison me this night, and taken proper means to counteract his design. There are others here present, leagued in the same evil conspiracy; and did I so please, I could name them one by one. Look not to your attendants, Duke of Cleves; for know, that in this building and around it I have enough faithful friends, to bind every traitor present hand and foot, and give them over to the common hangman—did I so will it. But fear not; I neither accuse you nor absolve you, my lord. You came here, a guest to the city of Ghent, and you depart unopposed, uninjured, with this warning only—beware how you entertain a thought against the liberties of the people. To the rest—within whose bosoms dwells the fearful consciousness of their own treachery—I say only, I do not dread them; and from my confidence in myself and in the people of Ghent, they find safety. Those who were moved to seek my overthrow by fears and doubts, instilled into them by yon arch traitor who now lies dead, will learn from my conduct this night, that I am not the man that I have been represented; and those who, from baser motives, would have compassed my death, may also learn, that such designs fall ever, sooner or later, on the heads of those that framed them. Those who love me not, therefore, may depart

in peace; those who love me and Ghent, remain; and let us finish our festivities, for the death of that base man is no more to be noted than the shooting of a wolf, or any other wild beast that would destroy us.—Take away the corpse!"

The guests looked upon each other with inquiring glances, as they stood around the table in the same attitudes into which they had started, on the sudden catastrophe they had just witnessed; but few present were willing, by quitting the hall, as the young President permitted, to brand themselves as enemies to Albert Maurice and to Ghent.

Good Martin Fruse was the first who resumed his seat, which he did, murmuring,—"He was an unworthy man, that Ganay, and a disgrace to the city. He nearly caused my death some twenty years ago."

Those who heard this new charge against the unhappy druggist started, and many looked wise, and shook the sagacious head, exclaiming,—"Ah! we always knew he was a wicked man!" but Albert Maurice, who understood that the mode of death to which his uncle alluded was not quite deserving of such serious comment, again called upon those who were friends to Ghent, and to himself, to resume their seats at once.

One after another, all the citizens, and almost all the nobles, followed the example of good Martin Fruse. The Duke of Cleves, however, together with a few of his immediate partisans, remained standing, and, after a brief pause, moved a step towards the door.

"It is not my custom," he said, "to sit and drink in halls where blood has just been shed; and without being an enemy to Ghent, or any of her true and faithful sons, I may be pardoned for quitting a place, where I know not what is to happen next."

"Fortunately for myself, my lord," replied Albert Maurice, "I *did* know what was intended to happen next; though, perhaps, my having spoiled the design may be matter of offence to some here present. But not to bandy words with so high a prince, I have only further to say, that the citizens of Ghent have been honoured by your presence while it has lasted; and you have, in return, been treated with a goodly and instructive, though somewhat fearful, spectacle—showing how the men of this city punish those who attempt to poison them at their solemn feasts.—Make way for the Duke of Cleves, there!"

And with an air in which courtesy and grace gave additional point to the keen scorn that curled his lip and bent his brow, Albert Maurice led the Duke towards the door, and bowed low as he passed out.

The young President then resumed his seat; his lip softened, his brow unbent, and, gazing round the guests with one of those bland smiles which often win approbation for the past, by seeming certain of applause, he exclaimed,—"Friends, have I done well?"

The man who rose to reply was one of the most zealous of that violent party, on whose support Ganay had founded his authority; and Albert Maurice prepared for bold opposition; for he knew him to be fierce and fearless, though honest and upright in purpose. By one of those sudden revolutions of feeling, however, which are common in scenes of great excitement, the whole sentiments of the partisan had become changed by the frank and determined demeanour of the young citizen; and he answered at once,—"So well have you done, Sir President, that, in my opinion, if Ghent owed you gratitude before, that gratitude ought now to be increased a hundred-fold; and if she suspected you of any baseness, those suspicions should be done away for ever. To many of us you have been represented as courting the nobility for your own purposes, and seeking alone, in all you have done, your own aggrandizement. Some of us, too, —I for one," he added, boldly,—"consented to your arrest this night. I acknowledge it; and frankly I acknowledge I was wrong. But believe me, Sir President, when with the same voice I declare, that, had I ever dreamed of the scheme for murdering you here, my own knife should first have drunk the blood of the assassin. Justly has he been done to death; and wisely have you treated yon proud prince, who courts us now, only, that he may first rise by us, and then crush us hereafter; and who—as no one that saw his countenance can doubt—was leagued with the dead assassin. It is the policy of those that hate us, to set us at variance amongst ourselves, and remove from us all the men whose talents and whose firmness will enable us to triumph still. Let us, then, all pledge ourselves to union; and, in order to preserve him who alone possesses genius and power sufficient to lead us properly, let us give him a guard of five hundred men, and intrust him with greater authority than he has hitherto enjoyed."

The proposal was received with acclamation; and the citizens —some eager to show that they had no participation in the plot which had just been frustrated—some carried away by the general enthusiasm—and some from the first devoted to the young President—vied with each other in voting him new powers and new dignities. At that moment he might have commanded anything in the power of the States of Flanders to bestow; and much more was spontaneously offered than he thought prudent to accept. "No, no!" he said; "limit the power you grant me to that which your fathers formerly conferred, in this very hall, on Jacob Von Artevelde, with this further restriction, that I shall submit, every month, the revenues intrusted to my disposal, to the inspection of three persons chosen from your own body. Thus shall I be enabled to serve you as much as man can do; and thus will you guard against those abuses to which the unlimited confidence of your ancestors gave rise. Nothing more will I accept."

The will of the young citizen for the time was law, and the whole arrangement was speedily completed. One more deep cup of red wine each man present quaffed to the health of Albert Maurice, and then took leave, one by one. Martin Fruse was the last that left him; and as he did so, the good old man wrung his hand hard. "Farewell, Albert," he said; "I have seen you a little child, and I have seen you a stately man, and I have loved you better than anything else on earth throughout my life. You have now reached a dizzy height, my dear boy; and, oh! take care that your head do not turn giddy.—For my sake, if not for your own, take care;—for it would slay me to see your fall."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Few, but those who have passed through such scenes, and have felt the mighty strife of Titan passions not only acting around them, but struggling in the narrow battle-field of their own bosoms, can at all comprehend what it is, after hours of contention, difficulty, and danger—where life and death hung upon a breath or movement—to find one's self alone and successful.

If there be a feeling amongst the many which visit the human heart, in this dark and misty abode of mortal existence,—if there be a feeling amongst all those which, like angel or devil, visits the lonely sojourner in the wilderness of being, to raise him to the sky, or plunge him in the abyss,—if there be a feeling on earth that really deserves the name of sublime, it is the first calm sensation of dangers encountered and conquered, of mighty things endeavoured and achieved.

Albert Maurice sat alone, after an evening of such fearful excitement, as few have ever passed upon this earth,—after having seen his own life, and power, and hopes, in momentary danger,—after having controlled and concealed his own passions, and bridled, and governed, and guided those of others,—after having overthrown his enemies, slain his betrayer, secured his authority, and taken all but one small easy step to the very summit of his ambition. Oh, what a host of mingled sensations crowded rapidly on his heart! and how dizzily his brain whirled for the first few brief moments, while remembrance rapidly brought before him all the multiplied events of the last two hours; and out of the smoke of memory rose the giant consciousness that he was successful—triumphantly successful!

For an instant his lip curled with a proud and satisfied smile; and everything was forgotten, but that bright bubble—success. But, as he sat, a sort of lassitude came over him; his eye fell casually on the spot where the druggist Ganay had lain, convulsed in the agonies of death; and, by a caprice of the imagination, the same face which had then appeared streaked with ghastly blood, and contorted with the pangs of dissolution, was presented to his memory, as he had seen it in former days, speaking the words of hope to his own ear, and cheering him on the path of enterprise and ambition.

Touched by the magic wand of association, the splendid objects which he had just been contemplating began to change their form and lose their brightness. A dull weight of thought seemed to fall upon him, and his utmost efforts would not throw it off. It seemed as if some fiend, in bitter mockery, resolved to conjure up the faces of the dead, and to torture his heart with painful recollections, even in the hour of triumph. To the form of the druggist, next succeeded, before the eye of fancy, that of the Duke of Gueldres, dyeing the green sward with his blood; and then, the shifting picture of the mind presented the

same prince as when first, with buoyant joy, he came to thank him for his liberation. Next appeared Imbercourt and Hugonet, bending to the stroke of the executioner: and then, again, he beheld them, as they had appeared at the council, when he had been examined on the accusation of the Prévôt; while the calm, grave, noble countenance of Imbercourt was seen, by imagination, pleading eagerly in exculpation of him, who had since worked out the death of his defender.

"So many, in so short a time!" thought Albert Maurice. "Yet have they died, each for his own misdeeds; and I have sacrificed them—ay, and with pain—for the good of my country alone!"

He almost started at the vehemence with which conscience gave the lie to so base a delusion. "For the good of my country alone!" he thought again. "Nay—nay—nay—for my own ambition. What—what act have I done yet, for the good of my country *alone?* None, alas! none! and even now, perhaps,—even now, when ambition has swallowed up all—when I have reached the very pinnacle of success,—perhaps the only one I have suffered to escape—perhaps yon Duke of Cleves is even now plotting to deprive me of the only reward that can wipe away every evil memory, repay every effort, tranquillize every pain, and render success a blessing indeed. But he shall plot in vain; and if he dare to plot, by the Lord that lives, he shall die!

"Ho! without there!" he continued, aloud. "Bring me a hat and cloak! Oh, good Matthew Gournay—I had forgot," he added, as he saw who it was that answered his summons—"this very night your noble lord shall be set free. But I must see him myself; I have tidings for him which will glad his heart. You, too, shall not be forgotten; and though I know, gold can never pay such services as yours, yet there are other means within my power. This very night we will set free your lord. In all the turbulence of the past evening, I had forgot what I should have remembered.—No, no, boy"—he added, to the page who brought him a high-plumed bonnet and richly decorated cloak—"no, no! these vestments I have on are all too fine already. I would have something to conceal my rank—my station in the city, I should say. Get me some servant's cloak and hat. Be quick! 'Tis nearly ten."

The President mused thoughtfully till the boy returned; and

honest Matthew Gournay, seeing that deep and agitating thoughts were engrossing all his attention, stood quietly gazing on the spot where he had slain the unhappy Ganay, and wondering that any man should take the trouble of poisoning another, when he might rid himself of his enemy so easily by the dagger or the sword.

At length the hat and cloak were brought; and Albert Maurice drew the one round his person, and the other over his brow. "Now, Matthew Gournay," he said, "take five-and-twenty men, and bid them follow me by separate ways to the palace. There wait till I come. I will be in the square almost as soon as you; and after I have spent some ten minutes in transacting business which admits of no delay, we will go on and liberate your good lord."

The ring which Matthew Gournay had received from his young lord, acted with the magic effect of some talisman in an Eastern tale; and whatever commands he received from Albert Maurice, he obeyed at once, with unquestioning alacrity. The five-and-twenty men were soon summoned,—for the whole force of the free companions had been poured into the town of Ghent, during the evening, by means of the gate which, as we have seen, the followers of the President had secured on his first entering the city. A few brief words directed them by different ways to the palace; and—passing through the various crowds which had been gathered together for the entertainment in the square, and which were now discussing, in eager tones, the events that had taken place in the town-house—the men selected to accompany, or rather to follow, the young citizen, soon made their way to the gates of the palace.

That part of the town was nearly deserted, and the little square before the Cours du Prince was void and solitary, except where, nearly in the midst, a tall, dark figure, with its arms crossed upon its chest, stood gazing up at the building. All was quiet, and calm, and dark, along the façade of the palace, except where, here and there, from some of the long narrow windows, a stream of tremulous light broke upon the night.

For several minutes the figure continued to gaze, apparently fixing its glance earnestly upon one part of the building. But at length perceiving the number of soldiers collecting before the gate, Albert Maurice—for he it was, who had outwalked his followers—advanced, and after speaking a few words to Matthew

Gournay, demanded admission from the warder of the fortified gate. He gave his name and station, and urged business of importance as an excuse for the lateness of his visit. The warder replied in a tone of humble deference, which circumstances had compelled the proud soldiers of Burgundy to learn in speaking to the once contemned burghers of Ghent, telling him that he would willingly admit him, but that, as his orders had been very strict for the last week, he must detain him at the gate while he caused the Princess to be informed of the fact.

Albert Maurice made no objection, and remained, musing with a downcast countenance, across which the shadows of many emotions were passing, that he would not willingly have shown to the eye of open day. As calm and tranquil as a summer's morning, he had sat his horse in the midst of battle and conflict. Calmly, too, he had remained beside the man who was mixing a cup of poison for his lip, and preparing the dagger if the cup should fail. But now every nerve thrilled, and his heart beat faint like a coward's, though he was but about to meet a fair and gentle girl, whose fate might almost be said to rest in his own hands. He had hoped, and he had dreamt, through many a long day; and various circumstances had combined to give those hopes and dreams a tangible foundation and a definite form. But now that the moment approached when they were to be realized or destroyed for ever, they faded all away into fears and anxieties.

The warder returned and bowed low, while the gates were thrown open. The soldiers within the court did military honours to the President of Ghent; and, assuming a firmer step and a prouder air, Albert Maurice passed on within the precincts of the palace, followed by the train who had met him according to his appointment. At the entrance-hall his followers paused; and he himself, ushered forward by one of the domestic attendants of the Princess, ascended the steps towards a smaller chamber, adjoining the great hall of audience.

In the ante-room he cast off his hat and cloak, and remained in the rich dress in which he had descended to the banquet in the town-house; and as he passed on towards the door which the servant threw open, his eye fell upon a Venetian mirror, and perhaps he gained another ray of hope, from feeling that, in appearance as well as mind, he was not unfitted to move through those lordly halls, in the high station for which his ambition strove.

The chamber that he entered was but dimly lighted; and it

was evident that the preparations for receiving him there, had only been made upon the sudden announcement of his arrival. His eye, however, instantly rested upon Mary of Burgundy, as she sat surrounded by a number of her women; and the sweet smile with which she welcomed him so thrilled through his heart, that he felt the resolution which had brought him thither shaken, lest, by seeking for deeper happiness, he should lose even the joy of that sweet smile itself.

"Welcome, my lord," she said—"most welcome back again to Ghent. For though we have had great joy from your victories and successes,—the first that have ever yet blessed our cause,—yet we have much needed your presence in the city."

"I hope, lady," replied the young citizen, with a tone of deep interest in all that concerned her immediate happiness—"I hope that you have suffered no personal annoyance; for, believe me, before I went, I took every means to guard you from the importunity of the Duke of Gueldres, or the intrusion of any one else."

"From the Duke of Gueldres," replied Mary, "who, I hear—unhappy man—has fallen in some of the late conflicts, I have, indeed, suffered nothing; nor have I truly to complain of any one else. Though my good cousin of Cleves does, perhaps, press me somewhat unkindly to an union, which is little less fearful in my eyes than the other. Doubtless, however, he deems it for my good, and strong are the reasons he urges; but having taken on myself to decide, and having told him that decision, I would fain be spared all further discussion."

The cheek of Albert Maurice reddened with anger; and he answered hastily,—"Fear not, dear lady; his importunities shall not press upon your Grace much longer. The city of Ghent and the States of Flanders have this night armed me, thank God! with sufficient power to sweep—to—to——"

Albert Maurice paused and hesitated; for the bold and ambitious words that had been just springing to his lips, he felt must not be rashly uttered in the ear of one whose love was to be gained and fixed, and whose hand,—although it was the crowning object of all his ambition—though it was the motive for every energy and endeavour of his bosom,—would at once become vain and valueless, if unaccompanied by her heart.

He paused, and then continued,—"have armed me with sufficient power, at once to guide the state, I trust, to permanent

security and peace; and to sweep away from your domestic life every pain, anxiety, and fear."

The last words were spoken low and slowly; and as he pronounced them, he dropped his eyes to the ground; while the warm conscious blood rose up into his cheeks, and spoke far more than his lips. The words he uttered, it is true, had no very definite meaning, and might be taken up in a very general sense; but the tone, the manner, the hesitation, the flushing of the cheek, the timid glance of the eye, gave emphasis and purpose to the whole. For the first time, a suspicion of what was passing in his bosom flashed across the mind of Mary of Burgundy, and inspired her, for the moment, with a feeling of terror which approached very nearly to despair. She turned deadly pale, and trembled violently, as, with rapid thought, she ran over the circumstances of her situation, and found how helpless she was, if that suspicion were well founded. It was but for an instant, however, that she gave way to apprehension. From the first, she had appreciated the general character of Albert Maurice, especially its finer points, by a sort of instinctive comparison with her own. She knew that he was generous, high-spirited, noble-minded; and, though she might now find that her estimate of his ambition had been far below that which it should have been, yet she trusted to the better parts of his disposition to deliver her from the consequences of the worse. She knew that she was in his power. She felt that his will was law, in all the country that surrounded her; and that, if he chose, he could blast her hopes and happiness for ever. But, at the same time, she felt that there was some resource—though the only one—in the native generosity of his heart; and she determined to appeal to it boldly as her sole refuge from despair. It is true that an union with Albert Maurice, whose many splendid qualities she could not but acknowledge, might — were such feelings susceptible of any very marked shades of difference, and had it been possible for her to dream for one moment of such an union— might have been less repugnant to her, than the marriages which had been proposed with the drivelling boy of France, with the coarse and brutal son of the Duke of Cleves, or with the cruel and unnatural Duke of Gueldres. But, still, the simple fact existed,—she loved another with all the deep sincerity of a woman's first affection, and the very thought of any other alliance was abhorrent to every feeling of her heart.

Nothing could have balanced those feelings in her bosom, but her strong sense of duty to the nation she was called upon to govern and protect. She could, indeed, and would, have sacrificed everything for her country and her people; but that people themselves had rejected the only alliance that could have benefited them; and, in the present instance, no such object could be gained by her marriage with the President of Ghent, as that which the French alliance might have accomplished, even could she have entertained the thought of bestowing the hand of the heiress of Burgundy on an adventurous and aspiring citizen,—a thought from which all Mary's feelings revolted, not the less strongly for the natural gentleness of her character. Had time for reflection been added, the discovery or the suspicion of his love might have afforded a key to all the conduct of the young citizen, and, by showing to what deeds his passion had already betrayed him, might have increased a thousand-fold the terror of the unhappy Princess; but, luckily the consideration of her own situation, and of the means of averting the consequences she dreaded, engrossed her wholly, and thus guarded her from worse apprehensions.

The first effect of his speech, and of the sudden conviction which his manner, more than his words, produced, was, as we said, to turn her deadly pale; and while a thousand new anxieties and painful considerations crossed her mind, she remained gazing on him so long, in silence, that she felt, he must see that he was understood. The silence of her own embarrassment then becoming painful to her, as well as to him, the blood rushed up into her face, and yet she could not reply; so that both remained completely mute for several moments, after words had been spoken, which, to the by-standers, seemed perfectly simple.

At length she answered,—"Oh! Sir President, if such power has been granted to you, by the States, use it nobly, and Heaven will bless you."

"As far, lady, as my poor judgment can extend, I will use it nobly," replied Albert Maurice, over whose heart an icy chill had come, he knew not well why. "But," he added, "as I would fain use it for your happiness—believing it to be inseparable from that of the people—let me crave a few words with you in private, that I may ascertain more fully how that happiness may be best consulted."

He spoke slowly and calmly; but, from the quivering of his lip, it was evident that each word cost him a painful struggle to pronounce. On the other hand, Mary was herself embarrassed by his request, which was not a little contrary to the etiquette of her situation; and yet he who requested, she knew, might command; and she felt that, perhaps, it might be better for both that they should be alone.

After a moment's pause, then, she gave the necessary order for her attendants to withdraw into the antechamber, and then resumed her seat. Albert Maurice stood beside her, with his eyes still bent upon the ground; and for a moment, even after the last of the Princess's suite had quitted the chamber, he remained silent, striving to master all the emotions which were agitating his heart. It was a painful struggle, but at length he succeeded; and then raising his head with some degree of proud consciousness in his aspect, he looked calmly on the Princess.

"Madam," he said, in a firmer voice than he had hitherto commanded, "your general welfare, and that of your people, is undoubtedly one great, and ought to be one paramount, object with me in all I strive for; but, at the same time, believe me—oh, believe me!—that your individual happiness is no less a deep and overpowering consideration in my mind. Lady, I know, and feel painfully, that the great difference of rank and station between us, may prevent you from conceiving fully how dear your interests are to me.—Nay, turn not pale, madam!"—he added, with watchful and somewhat irritable pride, softened by deep and sincere affection—"Nay, turn not pale! No word shall you hear from my lips, that may offend your ear or wound your heart. Lady, the ambitious, misproud citizen may have as elevated—perhaps more devoted—ideas of true affection, than the noble, whose pride and arrogance are his right of birth; and may be able to crush his own heart, to sacrifice more than life—hope, blessed hope itself—to serve the being that he loves.—And do you weep?" he continued, seeing the tears roll rapidly over the fair cheek of Mary of Burgundy. "And do you weep? Then I have said too much. Yet, hear me a little. I see you agitated—far more agitated than anything which has passed hitherto should have occasioned, unless the words we have spoken, whose import seems but small, may have touched some fine strung cord within your heart, and made sadder music than I dreamed of. However, in this land of Flanders I have now no small power—

which may last God knows how long. But fear not that the power I do possess will ever be used to thwart one wish of your heart. Whatever it may cost me, it shall be employed to serve you with deep and true attachment.—There is—there is," he added, his emotion almost mastering his calmness; "there is one question I would ask, which is hard to put, and may be painful to answer. Yet, let me speak it quickly and briefly, lest I should fail."

He paused for a moment, and looked down; while his hand became clenched fearfully tight, as if in the struggle to suppress some deep feelings that would fain have burst forth; but, after a single moment, all was again vanquished, and he proceeded:—"Some months have now passed since your father's eyes were closed in death; your dominions are invaded; your people are distracted by different parties, and your nobles are leaguing together to snatch one from another the blessing of your hand. It is time, lady, that you should make a choice; and although I know no one, on all the earth, that is worthy of the happiness within your gift, yet, if there be any one to whom you can give your heart, I will—I will—Yes!" he added, more firmly, "I will do all that mortal man can do, to render you happy in your love!"

He paused; and although an undefinable something in the conduct and demeanour of Mary of Burgundy through that night, had already shown him that one half of his dreams were dreams indeed; yet hope—persevering hope—lingered still, and whispered, "If she love none else, she may still be mine."

Mary of Burgundy's conduct was already determined; but nevertheless she trembled in every limb; and long, long was it, ere she could reply. At length she answered;—"You have, indeed, put to me a question, which makes me feel most painfully how different is the station of princes from the happy and modest retirement of private life. Nay, do not think I blame you, sir,—I blame but my hard fate. You are most kind; and, amidst a base and interested crowd, who would fain make me the slave of their wild ambitions, I shall ever remember you with gratitude, as the only one who—who—with more power than all the rest to command my fate, was willing to cast self away, and —and to seek my happiness alone. Feeling thus,—believing from my heart that in your generous nature I may perfectly rely,—I answer your question as distinctly as it is put. There

is, I believe, upon the face of the earth but one man to whom I can conscientiously give my hand. 'Tis now near two years ago, that, by my father's command, I plighted my faith in writing, and pledged thereto a ring, to one, whom I had been taught, during some months of happy intimacy, to look upon as my future lord:—Maximilian, Archduke of Austria——"

"And you love him! and you love him!" cried Albert Maurice, starting forward, and, forgetful of all restraint, grasping her firmly by the wrist. The Princess started up alarmed, and a cry of terror at his sudden vehemence, had nearly passed her lips. But she stifled it ere it was uttered; and the next moment Albert Maurice had recovered himself, and was kneeling at her feet.

"Pardon me! pardon me, Princess of Burgundy!" he said. "Give me—oh, give me your forgiveness! The dream is gone! the vision is over! and Albert Maurice, the humblest of your subjects, is ready to pour out his blood, to atone for all that he has done amiss. Madam," he added, rising, "I have been living in a dream; and, I fear me, when I come to look upon it steadily, I shall find it a sad one. But no more of that: at present I am —if that be not a dream also—President of the States General of Flanders, and armed with greater power than any other man in the land. What can I do to sweep all obstacles from before your wishes? Tell me quickly how I can serve you. Let me, at least, work out your happiness, before the memory of the past turn my brain."

"Oh, speak not so wildly, sir!" cried Mary. "You have great powers and noble energies, which will guide you to the height of fame; and yet, I trust, to the height of happiness. Indeed, sir, I cannot speak farther, while you seem so moved."

"Madam, I am perfectly calm," replied Albert Maurice. "Those energies and those powers your Grace is pleased to speak of, may last a longer or a shorter time, according to God's will; and I am most anxious to wipe out any offence I have committed, by employing them vigorously in your service. Let me beseech you to speak. Shall I send off immediate messengers to the Archduke?"

"No, no! Oh, no!" cried Mary; "I fear too much has been done already in that course, by my kind step-dame, the Duchess Margaret, and my good cousin of Ravestein; for I hear—for I hear—that the Archduke is already on his way to Brussels."

"Ha!" cried Albert Maurice; "ha!"—but he said no more, and the Princess proceeded.

"Yet, sir," she said, "I have many fears; for I know that the Duke of Cleves has not only sent forth messengers to forbid his approach to the city, but also, I learn from my dear friend and foster-sister, Alice of Imbercourt, who is now with the good Lord of Hannut, that a hundred men, bearing the colours of the house of Cleves, have passed through Brussels; and there is reason to believe, they waylay the road from the Rhine."

"Indeed! This must be seen to!" said the young citizen, in the same abstracted manner. "But your Grace was about to add——"

"Merely this, sir," replied Mary, with that calm, impressive gentleness that is more touching than any vehemence; "that the man to whom I believe myself plighted by every tie but the final sanction of the church, is, I am told, on his road hither, slenderly accompanied,—for the avarice of the emperor is well known,—and his son now journeys with hardly ten attendants. He has enemies,—strong enemies on the way,—and I leave you to judge, sir, of the feelings that I experience."

The lip of Albert Maurice quivered; but he still retained command over himself, and replied in a low but distinct voice, though, in every tone, the vehement struggle he maintained to master the agony of his heart was still apparent:—"To calm those feelings, madam, shall be my first effort; and, as I have received timely information, entertain not the slightest apprehension of the result. I will serve you, madam, more devotedly than I would serve myself; and the last energies that, possibly, I may ever be able to command, shall be directed to secure your happiness. I have now detained you long. Night wears, and time is precious. I humbly take my leave. May Heaven bless you, madam! May Heaven bless you! and send you happier days, to shine upon your reign, than those with which it has begun."

He bowed low, and took two or three steps towards the door, while Mary gazed upon him, with eyes in which compassion for all she saw that he suffered, and woman's invariable sympathy with love, called up an unwilling tear. "Stay, sir, one moment," she said, at length; "it may be the last time that ever I shall have the power to thank you, as Duchess of Burgundy, before I resign my sovereignty with my hand to another. Believe me, then, that as far as the gratitude of a princess towards a subject can extend, I am grateful to you for all that you have done in

my behalf. Believe me, too, that I admire and esteem the great qualities of your mind, and that I will, as far as in me lies, teach my husband"—and she laid a stress upon the word—" to appreciate your talents and your virtues, and to honour and employ them for our common benefit. Take this jewel, I beseech you," she added, " and wear it ever as a token of my gratitude."

" Oh! madam!" exclaimed Albert Maurice, as he advanced to receive the diamond she proffered. He took it slowly and reverentially; but, as her hand resigned it, his feelings overpowered him, and pressing the jewel suddenly to his heart, he exclaimed, " I will carry it to my grave!" Then turning, without farther adieu, he threw open the door and quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Painful and terrific as had been the struggle in the bosom of Albert Maurice, while he remained in the presence of the Princess, his feelings had been light and sunshiny, compared with those which he experienced when he found himself alone with the deep gloom—the dull, immovable despair, which at once took possession of his heart, the moment that thought had an opportunity to rest upon his own situation. We have before seen that remorse was already busy in his bosom; and the only shield that guarded him from the lash of his own reflections, had been the bright surpassing hope of overcoming all the mighty obstacles before him, and winning her he loved. But now he had triumphed over every enemy—he had overleaped every barrier—he had set his foot upon every obstacle, and, in the end, discovered that she loved another—that all was useless, he had done—that the blood he had shed, had been shed in vain—that he had forgotten his country and her rights—that he had forgotten justice and humanity — that he had yielded himself entirely to ambition, and consigned himself to remorse for ever —for a dream that was gone. Nor was this all; the same deep, fiery, passionate love remained in his heart, but was now doomed, instead of the bright follower of hope, to become the sad companion of remorse and despair. When he thought of

the future,—when she should become the bride of another,—he felt his brain reel under the agony of that contemplation. When he thought of the past, he felt that the gnawing worm was for ever destined to prey upon his heart. There was no refuge for him in all time, to which he could fly for relief. The gone hours were full of reproach, and the approaching ones were all bitterness.

Such were his feelings as he strode along the passages of the palace at Ghent; and the incoherent words that he muttered to himself, as he proceeded, showed how terrible had been their effect already upon his bright and powerful mind. "They have been murdered in vain,"—he muttered,—"they have been murdered in vain. Their blood cries up to heaven against me. To see her in the arms of another—Oh, God! oh, God!—But she shall be happy. Yes—she shall be happy. I will provide for his safety, as a brother—and she shall be happy; and I?—and I?—Why there is the grave—that is one resource, at least!" and suddenly he burst into a low, involuntary laugh, which made him start even as it rang upon his own ear. "Am I insane?" he thought; "then I must be speedy, lest the power fail me." And again muttering disjointed sentences, he proceeded down the great staircase, and was passing through the entrance-hall, without noticing any one, when Matthew Gournay advanced to his side and stopped him.

"There is no time to be lost, sir," he said; "let us hasten quick."

"Who are you?" demanded Albert Maurice, gazing vacantly upon him. "Who are you?—Oh, yes! I had forgot," he added, recalling his thoughts. "Other things were pressing on my mind. We will go presently, but I must first return to the town-house; and yet that square—I love not to pass that square, where they were beheaded."

"You have no time, sir," replied the old soldier, in a tone which again recalled Albert Maurice to the present moment. "As I sat here but now, that evil Prévôt—that Maillotin du Bac—passed through the hall, with several others, speaking eagerly of you. His eye fell upon me, and he may chance to know me well. At all events, he was silent instantly; but, if I am not very wrong indeed, he has taken his way towards the prison, where my young lord lies; and, perchance, if we be not quick, we may come too late."

"You speak true—lead on!" cried Albert Maurice, roused to the exertion of all his powers by the sudden call upon his energy. "You, young man, run as for your life to the town-house! Bid the commander of the burgher guard march a hundred men instantly down to the Prévôt's prison, near the gates.—But who have we here?" he added, as a man in breathless haste ran up the steps into the hall. "The lieutenant of the Prévôt, as I live! How now, sir, whom seek you?"

"You, Sir President," replied the man, at once. "You once saved me when I was in imminent peril; and I now think that the news I bring may be valuable to you. The prisoner who was made in the market-place,—the Vert Gallant of Hannut,—men say you owe him something, and would fain repay it. But, if you hasten not your steps, you will come too late. I have done what I can to delay the Prévôt, but he is now speeding on to the prison. His purpose is against the life of the prisoner; and his horses are ready to fly from Ghent for ever."

"Enough, enough!" said Albert Maurice, passing him suddenly, and springing down the steps of the palace. The court was soon traversed, and the streets leading towards the gate were threaded by the young citizen and his followers with the speed of light. The active exertion of his corporeal powers seemed to give back to Albert Maurice full command of his mental ones, at least for the time; and though his thoughts were characterized by the darkest and sternest despair, they wandered not from those points to which he strove to bend them, and he seemed revolving eagerly some plan of future conduct. "Yes," he said, half aloud, as he strode on,—"yes! so shall it be,—so shall it be! If I am in time, he shall conduct the rest; and, ere all be finished, the world may have cause to know that there were some drops of Roman blood even within this bosom."

Almost as he spoke he turned the corner of a street, which led into one of those conducting directly towards the Alost gate. Fifty yards farther from the town walls than the point at which the narrow street he had been pursuing entered the other, stood a small stone building, with a few narrow slits in the masonry for windows, known as the Prévôt's prison, in which he lodged any newly arrested prisoners, previous either to their immediate execution or to their removal to some other place of confinement. The street was all dark, and likewise solitary, except where,

under the projection of a house—the upper stories of which, as was often customary in Ghent, protruded considerably beyond the lower ones—stood four or five men, holding saddled horses, and conversing together in a low tone.

The impatient stamping of their steeds had prevented them from catching the approaching steps of Albert Maurice and his party; and one was saying to the other, at the very moment they came up, in a tone sufficiently loud for his words to be distinguished,—"He is very long! I never knew him so long about such a job before!"

"Let them be seized!" exclaimed Albert Maurice, the instant his eye fell upon them; "the rest follow me;" and without waiting to notice the short scuffle that ensued, he sprang on towards the Prévôt's prison, and pushed against the door. It was locked, and the key on the inner side, so that his effort to open it was vain.

"Fly to the gate!" he exclaimed, turning to one of his followers: "bring me a battle-axe from the guard-house. Ho! within there," he added, striking the hilt of his sword violently against the door. "Open the door! beware what you do; you cannot escape me; and you shall find my vengeance terrible. Open the door, I say!"

But he spoke in vain: no answer was returned; and the only sound that he even thought he heard, was that of a low groan. After a few moments of painful expectation the man who had been sent to the gate returned, bearing a ponderous axe, and followed by two or three of the soldiers of the guard.

Albert Maurice snatched the weapon from his hands, and in three blows dashed in a large part of the door. The rest was soon hewn down, at least sufficiently to admit the passage of the young burgher and his followers. Entering the small stone hall into which it opened, he caught up a light that had evidently been burning some time untrimmed; and, commanding two or three of those who accompanied him to guard the door, he strode forward rapidly to the mouth of a narrow flight of steps, which led to some cells below the ground. At the entrance of one of these dungeons a lantern had been placed upon the ground, and was still burning; and Albert Maurice immediately perceived that the door was not completely closed. He instantly pushed it open, and held up the light, when the sight that presented itself to his eyes was horrible indeed, but not ungrateful.

Seated upon the side of the straw pallet, which had been his only couch since he had been removed from the town-house, appeared Hugh de Mortmar, as we have previously called him, with his right foot pressed heavily upon the body of a man, who, from his dress and appearance, seemed to be one of the jailers in the employ of the Prévôt. A little to the right, surrounded by a pool of blood,—a stream of which was still flowing from his throat,—lay the form of Maillotin du Bac, while the poniard, which, it may be remembered, Albert Maurice had bestowed upon Hugh de Mortmar in the prison of the town-house, now driven tightly in between the gorget plaits and cuirass of the Prévot's armour, showed at once the manner of his death and the arm which had inflicted it.

The young prisoner held in his hand the sword of the dead man, and gazed upon those who entered with a firm and resolute countenance, while he held down beneath his feet the form of the jailer, who was clearly alive, and seemingly uninjured, except from a ghastly contusion on his forehead. The moment that he beheld who were the new comers, Hugh de Mortmar started up; and a few hurried words explained the precise situation in which they all stood. The sight of Albert Maurice and of good old Matthew Gournay was enough to satisfy the young prisoner; and on his part he had only to tell them, that while lying there a few minutes before, thinking of when his captivity might end, he had heard approaching steps, and listened to a low conversation at the door which he felt sure boded him no good. Affecting to sleep, he remained perfectly quiet while the door was opened, and the Prévôt, setting down his lantern on the outside, approached towards him, accompanied by the jailer who had the care of the prison. Their eyes, however, were not so much accustomed to the darkness as his own; and, seeing evidently that the design of the Prévôt was to despatch him, he watched his moment, till the other was stooping over him, and then drove the dagger with which he had been furnished, with the full force of recovered health and strength, under the gorget of the murderer. So hard had he stricken it, however, between the iron plates, that he could not draw it forth again, and he had nothing to trust to but his own corporeal strength in the struggle which succeeded with the jailer.

The hard food and the constrained repose to which he had

been subjected in the prison, had perhaps contributed to restore him to full vigour in a shorter time than might otherwise have been required for recovering his health; and the jailer, overmatched, had just been cast headlong to the ground when Albert Maurice forced his way into the place of the young noble's confinement.

In the energy of action Albert Maurice had, for the time, found relief from a part of the heavy load that passion and circumstances had piled upon his head; but the moment the necessity of active exertion passed away, the weight returned and crushed him to the earth. He spoke for an instant to the prisoner collectedly and calmly; but gradually his brow grew dark and clouded; and his words became low, harsh, and confined to those necessary to express his wishes or commands.

The jailer, freed from the tread of Hugh de Mortmar, was placed in the custody of some of those who had now crowded to the spot; and the President, after giving general orders to the burgher guard, which came up, and a few whispered directions to Matthew Gournay, took the prisoner by the hand, saying, "Come, my lord; let us to the town-house!"

The change which had come over the whole demeanour of the young citizen since last he had seen him, was too great to escape the eyes of Hugh de Mortmar, even at a moment when the excitement of a late struggle was fresh upon him. Nor did he exactly understand how the young President dared to take the bold step of setting him free at once, when he had before seemed most anxious to proceed with scrupulous caution. He made no observation, however, and followed Albert Maurice into the street. By this time, almost all the respectable citizens of Ghent were in their quiet beds; but a number of those who had been entertained in the market-place were still wandering about; some partially inebriated with ale or mead; some half drunk with excitement and pleasure. A number of these had gathered together amongst the guards and attendants, now collected round the door of the prison; and as Albert Maurice led forth his companion, and the flickering glare of a number of lanterns and torches showed the features of the President to the crowd, he was greeted by loud acclamations.

But the smile of bitterness and scorn with which Albert Maurice now heard the vivats of the multitude, contrasted strongly with

his demeanour in the morning, and showed how completely the talismanic touch of disappointment had changed to his eyes all the fairy splendours of his fate.

Without a word of reply, he passed through the midst of the crowd,—sought the narrowest and darkest way; and, apparently buried in sad thoughts, proceeded with a quick and irregular step towards the town-house, maintaining a gloomy and unbroken silence as he went. He avoided the market-place before the building as much as possible; and the only words he spoke, were uttered, when he could not avoid seeing the spot where Imbercourt and Hugonet had died, and which was now covered with people, busily removing the traces of the evening's festivity. "It is sad," he said, with a mournful shake of the head; "it is sad!" Then turning into the town-house, he ascended the stairs rapidly, and entered a small withdrawing room by the side of the great hall.

To that very chamber it so happened that the body of Ganay had been removed, after the sword of Matthew Gournay had left him lifeless on the pavement; and the first object that met the eye of Albert Maurice was the corpse stretched upon a table, while one of his own attendants stood near, as if he had been examining the appearance of the dead man. The immediate impulse of the President was to draw back; but the next was the very contrary; and, again advancing, he approached directly to the table, and fixed his eyes upon the face of the corpse, which was uncovered. "He sleeps calm enough!" he said, drawing in his lips, and turning partially to Hugh de Mortmar. "He sleeps calm enough, with all his burning passions at an end. But this is no place for what we have to say."

He was then treading back his steps towards the door, when the attendant advanced, and gave him a packet of papers and a small silver box, saying, "These old papers, sir, and this box, which we conceive to contain poison, are all that we have discovered on the dead body."

"Ha! will the means of death lie in so small a space?" said Albert Maurice, gazing on the little silver case; "but 'tis well! Bring hence the lights, leave the body, and lock the door. He will not find solitude oppressive, I doubt not;" and thus saying, he led the way into another chamber, to which the servant followed with the key and lights; and the President added farther, as they were set down before him, "Bring wine!"

When the man was gone, and he was seated with the young cavalier, he leaned his brow upon his hand for a moment, and then looked up,—"Give me your pardon, sir," he said; "give me your pardon for a short space. I am somewhat ill to-night, and must collect my thoughts, before I can speak to you as I ought."

Hugh de Mortmar bowed his head; and wine being brought in a few minutes, Albert Maurice filled for both, and drained his own cup to the dregs. "I have a burning thirst upon me," he said, "but it will soon be quenched. Now, sir, I can speak. You have recovered, I trust, your full strength; and this night—that is to say, ere dawn—can ride forth away from the thraldom of this place?"

"As well as ere I rode in life," replied Hugh de Mortmar, "and thank you deeply for your kind intentions."

"Thank not me," replied Albert Maurice, gravely, "for I am about—like a true citizen—" he added, with a bitter smile, "for I am about to drive a hard bargain with you; and to make you agree to do me a service in return,—not for giving you your liberty, for you did the like to me—but for some intelligence I have to communicate, which may be worth its weight in gold. Of that hereafter. First, let us speak of the service I require. You have at this moment, within the walls of the city, where I have given them employment during this evening, some three or four hundred free companions—good soldiers, levied for purposes I know and respect. In an hour's time they will be mounted, and at the Alost gate, from which we have just come. You shall have arms that might grace a prince, a horse as noble as ever was bestrode by knight; and what I require is this,—that, all other matter laid aside, you ride forward towards Brussels, and thence onward, on whatever road you may find necessary,—as you will there discover from the Lord of Ravestein, or the Duchess Dowager,—in order to meet Maximilian, Archduke of Austria."

"What! my best friend and old companion in arms!" cried Hugh de Mortmar. "No evil against him, Sir President! for know, I would sooner bear to my grave the heaviest chains that ever shackled man, than raise an arm against one I love so well!"

"Fear not, my lord!" replied Albert Maurice. "For his safety, not for his injury, would I have you set out. Tell him from me, Albert Maurice, that his way is beset,—tell him that every artifice will be used to make him turn back, by fair means

or by foul. But bid him hasten forward, in spite of all; and you, on your part, promise me, never to quit him, till you see him safely within the gates of the Duke's house in Ghent."

"Willingly! most willingly!" replied the young cavalier, rising. "I am ready to set out!"

"What, without the tidings I have promised?" demanded Albert Maurice.

"Some other time!" replied Hugh de Mortmar. "When I return will do."

"The present moment is yours," answered the young citizen, gravely. "Who can say that, by the time you return, these lips may not be closed by a seal, that no human hand can ever remove?"

"I trust not," replied the other; "I trust not; but if what you have to tell be really of importance, let me beseech you to speak it quickly."

"I will," replied Albert Maurice. "I have no right, nor any wish, to keep you in suspense. Are you aware that Adolphus, Duke of Gueldres, is dead?"

"Good God!" exclaimed the young cavalier. "They told me that he was quite well, and leading the forces of Ghent against Tournay. You have, indeed, ended my suspense somewhat abruptly."

"There is still more to come," said Albert Maurice, with a sort of reckless harshness, which was no part of his natural character; but which probably arose from the apathetic callousness of despair. "As you knew not that he was dead, you know not that this arm slew him."

"Ha!" cried the other, instinctively laying his hand upon his side, as if to grasp the hilt of his sword. "You—you! Did you shed my father's blood! Then, take heed to yourself. Call again for your jailers! Cast me back into the dungeon; for otherwise your blood must answer for that which you have spilt."

"Such threats," answered Albert Maurice, "are worse than vain, to one who loves life too little to care who takes it from him. Besides, they are prompted by a mere dream of the imagination, which I can dissolve by two or three words. You had never seen the Duke of Gueldres from your childhood; no sweet reciprocations of domestic love had bound your heart to his; you knew that he was vicious, criminal, unfeeling.—Nay, frown not, sir, but hear me.—You know all this; and, yet,

because you believe him to have been your father, you would slay any one that raised a hand against him."

Doubtless, there is inherent in human misery a desire of seeing others wretched when we are wretched ourselves; and the sort of painful playing with the feelings of the young cavalier, in which Albert Maurice indulged at a moment when he himself was plunged in the gloomiest despair, probably arose from some such cause. His own griefs, however, were too great to suffer his mind to dwell long upon anything without weariness; and he tired almost instantly of the topic.

"Too much of this!" he added, in the same abrupt tone. "Be your feelings on those points rational or not, no tie, human or divine, binds you to love or to avenge Adolphus, the bad Duke of Gueldres. Know, that at his instigation the man, whose corpse you saw but now, kindled the flames of Lindenmar, in which the infant heir of Hannut was supposed to have perished; and farther know, that in the act of death, the Duke of Gueldres confessed to me, that he himself carried away the infant, and reared him as his son upon the death of his own child. You are that boy; but you will want other proofs to establish the facts—there they are, in writing; and probably these papers which you saw me receive but now, may throw some farther light upon the matter. We have neither of us time to examine them more particularly at present. Take them with you, and claim your right of birth. Now follow me to the armory, for I hear your band passing onward towards the Alost gate to wait your coming. Are you strong enough to go?"

The young cavalier gazed for a moment in his face, bewildered by all he heard; but then replied, "I am ready! quite ready! For these papers I owe you a thousand thanks; but the tidings you have given confound me, and I have not words——"

"No more, no more!" replied Albert Maurice. "Here is our way."

The young citizen now led his companion forward to the armory, which had been collected in the town-house under his own care. As they went, the liberated prisoner would fain have asked a thousand questions explanatory of the strange tidings he had just received; but the answers of Albert Maurice were brief, and somewhat sharp. Referring him entirely to the papers that he had received, the young citizen strode onward,

and saw the Vert Gallant of Hannut equip himself once more in a complete suit of arms. There was a degree of joy in the countenance of the young heir of Hannut as he did so,—a sort of new lighting up of that military hope which was the great inspiration of the day,—that called a melancholy smile even to the lip of Albert Maurice; and he gazed upon him, as with quick and dexterous hands he clothed his powerful limbs in steel, as an old man on the verge of the tomb might be supposed to regard a youth setting out upon the flowery path of life, full of all those bright aspirations that had passed away from himself for ever.

When it was all done,—"Your horse," said the young citizen, "stands below; but yet one moment. A pass must be written for yourself and the Archduke. Follow me once more."

In the next chamber were implements for writing; and, with a rapid hand, Albert Maurice traced the necessary order, destined to remove all petty obstacles from the path of his princely rival, signed his name below in a bold, free hand, and gave it to his companion with a proud, but bitter smile.

"There," he said; "take it, and go forth! and may God speed you on your errand. Forgive me if I have sported with your feelings this night,—which may be I have done in some degree,—but there is a potent demon in my heart just now, that strives hard to crush each noble wish and kindly feeling, ere they can rise. Now, farewell!"

"Farewell! farewell!" replied Hugh of Hannut. "I may, perhaps, want more information than these papers contain. But we shall meet again!"

"Perhaps we may," replied Albert Maurice, as the other turned, and descended the steps. "Perhaps we may," he repeated, as, after a moment's pause, he heard the trampling of horse, announcing that the other had departed—"perhaps we may, in the grave, or, rather, beyond it."

The young President then returned to the chamber in which he had been sitting, and continued for about an hour engaged in writing. When he had concluded, he buried his eyes in his hands for a few moments, and remained plunged in deep thought. Rousing himself, he raised a lamp, and striding across the passages to the room where the corpse of Ganay the druggist lay, he threw open the door, and gazed upon the countenance of the dead man for some time.

Without a word, he then walked back to the chamber where he had been writing; and drawing forth the small silver box which had been given him, poured the white powder that it contained into one of the cups, added a little wine from the tankard, and drank off the mixture. After which he cast himself into a chair, and closed his eyes.

For several minutes he remained in the same position, without a muscle of his face being moved; but at length he opened his eyes, looking somewhat fiercely round the chamber.

"This is too much!" he exclaimed, aloud. "It has no effect! and I lie here, expecting death without a chance of his approach, while the past haunts me, and there seem voices crying up for judgment upon me, from yon accursed square. But I will soon end all!" and starting up, he drew his dagger from the sheath; but as he did so, something in the word judgment appeared to seize upon his imagination. "Judgment!" he said—"judgment! Am I not flying to judgment?" and laying down the dagger on the table, he paused, gazing round with a degree of fearful bewilderment in his eyes, which seemed to show either that his mind was shaken, or that some potent destroyer was mastering the body. "Judgment!" he repeated. "Were it not better to wait till I am summoned,—to strive to wipe out the evil,—and to bear the sorrows that God has given as a punishment for all that I have done, and left undone? Judgment!—Judgment!" But, as he repeated that awful word, his cheek grew deathly pale; cold drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead; his lips became nearly livid; and the rich curls of his dark hair, as if relaxed by the overpowering weakness that seemed coming over his whole frame, fell wild and floating upon his brow.

At first, apparently unconscious of the change that was taking place, he leaned his hand upon the table to steady himself as he stood; but the moment after, two or three sharp shudders passed over his whole frame; and after reeling painfully for an instant, he cast himself back into the chair, exclaiming, in a tone full of despair indeed, "It is too late! it is too late!" and he threw himself to and fro in restless agony.

"This is vain!" he cried, at length, opening his eyes. "This is weak, and empty, and cowardly! I that have lived boldly can surely die as I have lived;" and once more resuming the attitude in which he had placed himself at first, he clasped his hand

tight over his eyes, as if to exclude a painful sense of the light. In a moment or two, the hand dropped; but his eyes remained closed; and after a time, the exhausted lamps, which had now been burning many hours, went out, and all was darkness!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The rumour which had given to the heart of Mary of Burgundy the glad hope that Maximilian of Austria was already within her territories, had deceived her; and Hugh of Hannut, on arriving at Brussels, found that his princely companion-in-arms was still far from that city. True to the promise he had given, however, —though all his own feelings would have conducted him at once to the forest of Hannut, wherein he had led a life of such adventure and interest, and to the mansion where her he loved now dwelt, and in which his happiest days had been passed,— he advanced directly towards Cologne; and not far on the hither side of the Rhine, met the small party which accompanied the son of the Emperor. It were as tedious as an old chronicle to tell the joy of Maximilian at the coming of his friend, or to detail all the efforts that were made by the Duke of Cleves to deter or prevent the Archduke from pursuing his journey towards Ghent. The private information he had received, and the armed force which now accompanied him on his way, rendered all efforts either to alarm or impede him vain; and the rapid progress made by the French arms had so convinced the people of Flanders that a single leader, whose fortunes were linked for ever to that of the Princess of Burgundy, was absolutely necessary to give vigour and direction to their efforts, that all attempts to stir them up to oppose the alliance with the Austrian prince would have been fruitless under any circumstances.

One event, however, had happened in the meantime, which completely cooled throughout Flanders, that ardour for innovation, and that desire of democratic rule, which is one of the evils consequent upon every struggle for increased liberty, whether just or unjust—the wild spray which the waves of freedom cast beyond their legitimate bound.

The morning after the return of Albert Maurice to Ghent, some of his attendants, finding the door of his bedchamber open, entered, and discovered that he had never been in bed; and the alarm spreading, he was soon after found, seated in the chair in which he had been writing, cold, stiff, and dead.

Of the letters which were cast upon the table before him, one was addressed to the Princess, and one to his uncle; and both distinctly alluded to his intention of destroying himself. Left suddenly without a leader, pressed by a powerful enemy, and encumbered with the management of a state, all the springs and wheels of which they themselves had disarranged, the people of Ghent began to ask themselves what they had gained by pressing exaction and discontent beyond the mere recovery of their rights and privileges. The simplest amongst them saw that they had gained nothing and lost much; and the more clear-sighted discovered, that in carrying their efforts beyond the straightforward object which they had proposed at first, they had only made the government of the state an object of contention to bold and ambitious party leaders,—a race of men who, for the purpose of success, must always necessarily prolong that confusion and anarchy, which is more baleful than the worst of tyrannies; and who, when success is obtained, must end in tyranny to uphold their power.

The very day that the death of Albert Maurice was discovered, intelligence arrived that the armies of France, marching on from the side of Cassel, had burned some villages within four leagues of Ghent; and the Council of the States, confused, terrified, and surprised, without chief, without union, and without resource, proceeded in a body to the palace; and resigning at the feet of the Princess the authority they had usurped, demanded her orders and directions, in the imminent peril to which the state was exposed. It was then that Mary of Burgundy made that famous answer, which has been transmitted to us by almost every historian who has mentioned her name; but it was in sorrow, not in anger, that she spoke; and the tears were in her eyes, when—after hearing the details of a ruined country, an invaded territory, the rich harvests of Flanders reaped by strange husbandmen while they were green, her frontier fortresses taken, and her troops proving false—she replied to the subjects, whose turbulence and discontent had fostered, if not caused all the evils they recapitulated:—"You have banished my best friends, and

slain my wisest counsellors, and now what can I do to deliver you?"

But misfortune had taught the people of Ghent their own errors, and the excellence of her they had so basely outraged. The news that the Archduke of Austria, the long betrothed husband and the favoured lover of Mary of Burgundy, was advancing with rapid steps towards Ghent, spread as much joy through the city as if the tidings had been of some personal good fortune to each individual citizen. The gates of Ghent were now no longer guarded, except against the common enemy. The Duke of Cleves quitted the city in haste; and joy and satisfaction spread through all ranks when the cavalcade which escorted the Archduke wound on towards the palace. It was remarked, however, that nearly five hundred of the horsemen who accompanied him—and those, surpassing all the rest in military array and demeanour—were all adorned with a green scarf, while the banner that floated over them bore the arms of Hannut—Argent, a green tree proper; and that the knight who led this band of élite, though his beaver was now up, and his face exposed, was clothed from head to foot in the green armour of the Vert Gallant of Hannut.

Little more requires to be said. It is well known to every one, how gladly Mary of Burgundy herself saw the arrival of Maximilian; and there is every reason to believe that the old chronicler spoke the truth, when, in describing their first meeting, he said,—"Si parfaicte liesse fut oncques logée en cœur de parfaict amant, elle fut trouvée ce jour en l'assemblement de ces deux jouvenceaux."

Nor did the heart of Hugh de Hannut beat less highly, when, standing beside his princely friend, he, too, claimed his fair bride, Alice of Imbercourt. Still, the dead were to be mourned, and many sorrows were to be forgotten; but they were sorrows which drew the hearts of the living closer together.

A gleam of sunshine shone out at last upon the days of the good old Lord of Hannut; and casting from him the studies which—fanciful or real—had soothed his griefs by occupying his mind, he passed his latter years in rejoicing over the recovery of so noble and so dear a son.

On the nineteenth of August, 1477, Mary of Burgundy gave her hand to Maximilian of Austria; and the rich territories, which so many princes had coveted, and for which France had

played so base and subtle a game, passed away into another house. The years of that fair princess herself were few; but when she gazed smiling upon her husband and her children, she was wont to thank God that she had not looked into that fatal book, which might have given her an insight into her future destiny; and that in the happiness of the present she could see no ill to be anticipated for the future.

Alice of Imbercourt, soon after her marriage, retired from the city to the dwelling of her husband's father; and though her deep affection for Mary of Burgundy still continued unabated, she never more made the court her abode.

When, at length, the fatal accident happened, which caused the death of her fair foster-sister, she flew eagerly to soothe her couch of sickness; but she never entertained, for a moment, those hopes of her recovery, which all the others around indulged for several days. She it was who prepared the mind of the Archduke for the death of her he loved. She closed her eyes, and then returned to her own dwelling, and resumed the duties of her station.

The people of the country declared that Alice was not surprised by the event which had occurred, being forewarned by the previous knowledge of the future which she had obtained; and the old writers assert, most seriously, that the horoscope of Mary of Burgundy, as it was drawn at her birth, was fulfilled to the most minute particular. As no one, however, saw this horoscope but Alice of Imbercourt,—at least, before the latter events of Mary's life took place,—and as Alice carefully abstained from ever mentioning the subject, it is more than probable that the love of the marvellous, so prevalent in those days, adapted the prediction to the facts long after they occurred.

THE END.

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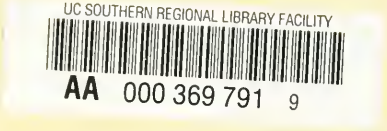

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